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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

ICELAND...players, coaching staff and officials celebrate on a stage at Ingolfstorg square in the centre of Reykjavik after Iceland became the smallest country (population wise) to qualify for a World Cup

TURKEY...a player celebrates after the hosts win the European Amputee Football Federation European Championship Final against England in Istanbul

PANAMA...Roman Torres of Panama takes a selfie with fans after his goal against Costa Rica in the World Cup qualifiers

RUSSIA...Tosno's Anton Zabolotny is outnumbered by a group of Rostov players

JAPAN...Kashiwa Reysol players applaud supporters after a 3-0 loss to Consadole Sapporo

WALES...a despondent Gareth Bale watches with anxious family and friends as Wales crash out of the World Cup qualifiers to Republic of Ireland

USA...Houston Dynamo forward Alberth Elis wears a panther mask to celebrate his goal against Minnesota United

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FROM THE EDITOR

Lionel Messi has graced the cover of *World Soccer* more times than I care to remember, but usually in the colours of Barcelona. Had he and Argentina not beaten Ecuador to rescue their place at next year's World Cup, it is likely that he would have announced his retirement from international football.

Instead, Messi's brilliant performance in Quito means we can look forward to the finals in Russia with added enthusiasm.

Although England laboured through their qualifying campaign, the rest of the world has produced some exciting stories. Panama, Iceland and Egypt are eye-catching qualifiers, either as novices or those returning after decades away.

The nature of football is that there will always be more losers than winners, so we cannot review the qualifiers without paying attention to those who missed out: Syria, USA, Chile and others.

And there is more to come, with Italy facing a tricky play-off against Sweden.

Messi's brilliant performance in Quito means we can look forward to the finals in Russia with added enthusiasm

In next month's issue we will profile all 32 qualifiers ahead of the draw for the finals.

See you then.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 Replay prompted by match-fixing claims p10
2 Jupp Heynckes back at Bayern Munich p70
3 Paris Saint-Germain owner accused of bribery p13
4 Messi saves Argentina in qualifiers p52
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6 Panama qualify for their first World Cup p55
7 Iceland make history with debut appearance p60
8 Egypt reach first finals for 28 years p62
9 IFAB set to confirm VAR at World Cup p18
10 Croatia turn to Dalic ahead of play-offs p21

FIFA

World Cup replay prompted by match-fixing suspicions

A massive spike in betting activity during the first half of last year's World Cup qualifier between South Africa and Senegal alerted FIFA to match fixing and led to the match being replayed in November in an unprecedented decision by world football's governing body, *World Soccer* can exclusively reveal.

Referee Joseph Lamptey was found guilty by FIFA of match manipulation and banned for life, with the result of the game nullified and South Africa stripped of the points after their 2-1 victory.

A flurry of bets placed in Hong Kong and Singapore just before Lamptey awarded a dubious penalty for a non-existent handball was picked up by FIFA's Early Warning System (EWS), a 10-year-old Zurich-based subsidiary that monitors betting on all FIFA matches.

Officials have told *World Soccer* they are not sure that the end result of the game was contrived but the penalty, awarded against Kalidou Koulibaly when the ball hit him on the knee, was certainly manipulated at the behest of Asian betting syndicates.

However, FIFA's investigation into Lamptey was not brought by the losing side making a complaint – a relatively common occurrence – but by the alarms set off at the EWS.

In March, FIFA made public the possibility of match fixing when they issued a statement detailing Lamptey's ban but without offering any further evidence. Lamptey lost an appeal and then took his case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, where FIFA's decision was upheld again.

Guilty...Joseph Lamptey

It was only after the judicial process that FIFA ordered a replay – the first of its kind for match manipulation.

The game is

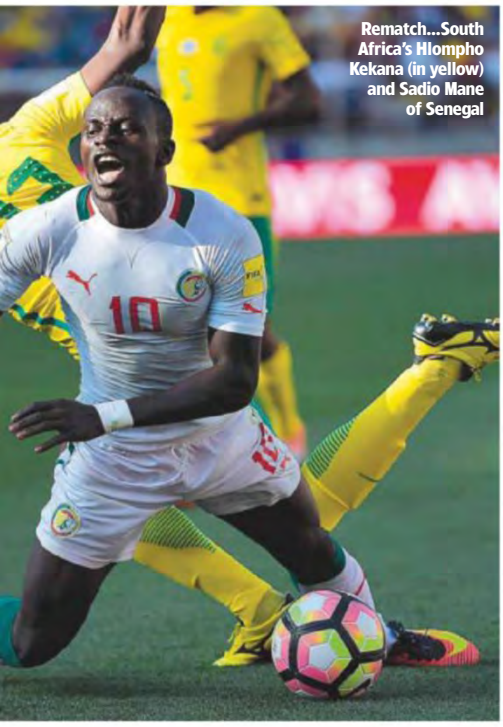
"It's his only honourable path"

New York Cosmos chairman Rocco B Commisso (right) calls on USA federation chief Sunil Gulati to quit after World Cup elimination

being replayed in Polokwane on November 10, with the two sides meeting in the Senegalese capital of Dakar for the return four days later.

If they win both matches South Africa will go from bottom to top in Group D of the African preliminaries and qualify for Russia. Senegal need two points to make the finals.

FIFA have failed to publicly explain the background to the Lamptey case and put in perspective the ordering of a replay. Instead, the vacuum of information has led to the impression that errant refereeing decisions can now be challenged – and, if successful, force



Rematch...South Africa's Hlompho Kekana (in yellow) and Sadio Mane of Senegal

games to be replayed.

Associations are failing to understand the difference between match manipulation and the principle that the referee's word is final, even if occasionally erroneous.

Burkina Faso, who are in the same group with Senegal and South Africa, along with Cape Verde – are themselves appealing to CAS over the order to replay the match because they say they "oppose a decision that is tainted by abuse of power and irrelevant to the texts of the international football authority".

It seems a long shot as South Africa are not objecting to the replay and their loss of three points, saying they understand why the game must be played over again on "moral grounds".

But they did insist FIFA send a letter to local media to exonerate the South African Football Association of any part in the match fixing.

Mark Gleeson

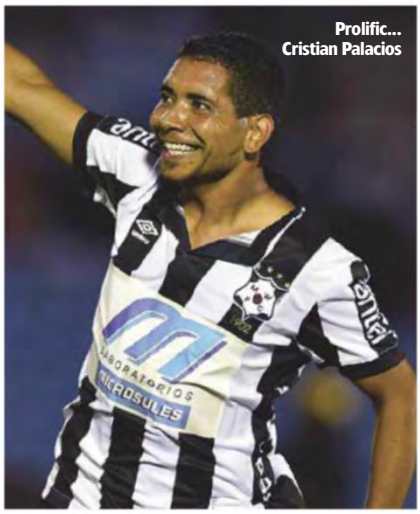
HEROES & VILLAINS

JAN VERTONGHEN

The 30-year-old Tottenham Hotspur defender became Belgium's most-capped player of all time, making a 97th appearance for his country in a 4-0 victory over Cyprus.

CRISTIAN PALACIOS

Scored 20 goals in 18 Uruguayan league games for Wanderers and Penarol throughout 2017.



Prolific... Cristian Palacios

MOHAMED SALAH

The Liverpool striker scored the penalty that ensured Egypt qualified for their first World Cup for 28 years.

MANCHESTER CITY KEEPERS

When Ederson saved Dries Mertens' penalty in City's Champions League win against Napoli, it was the sixth successive penalty save in a Champions League game for a Manchester City goalkeeper. Others to have saved spot-kicks during that run are Joe Hart (three times) and Willy Caballero (twice). Napoli's Amadou Diawara did score from the spot later in the same game for Napoli.

Impressive...Ederson saves Dries Mertens' spot-kick

Mistake... Julian Schuster (second from right)

JULIAN SCHUSTER

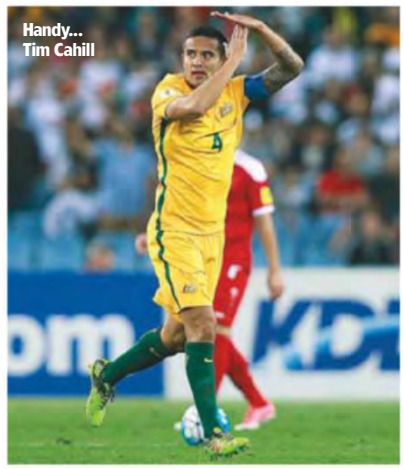
The Freiburg midfielder became the first player to score own goals in consecutive Bundesliga games, against Bayern Munich and Hoffenheim, since Duisburg's Andreas Gielchen in 1991.

CESC FABREGAS

Thirteen years after Alex Ferguson was hit with a slice of pizza after a game against Arsenal at Old Trafford, the former Gunners midfielder – who is now at Chelsea – admitted he was the one who had thrown food in the direction of the then Manchester United manager.

RICARDO CARVALHO

The 39-year-old former Portugal defender, who is still playing professionally with Shanghai SIPG in the Chinese Super League, was handed a seven-month suspended prison sentence in Spain for tax fraud.



Handy... Tim Cahill

TIM CAHILL

The Australia veteran was investigated by FIFA after it was reported that his winning goal against Syria was followed by a "sponsored" celebration, a "T" sign with his hands to replicate the initial of a personal sponsor.

"The signs of the zodiac are pointing to us being in Russia next year. Up to now, we haven't had the necessary spiritual assistance"

Self-styled exorcist Jean-Pierre Manzolo offers his services to DR Congo (left) in their final push for World Cup qualification

GOALS we'd like to see again

1 OLIVIER GIROUD
Arsenal v Red Star Belgrade
Following a well-worked move, he hooks the ball in with his back to goal.

2 SEBASTIAN RUDY
Germany v Northern Ireland
When Northern Ireland fail to clear a ball into their box, he unleashes a pile driver of a shot from 30 yards.

3 SAUL NIGUEZ
Atletico Madrid v Barcelona
Places a powerful shot beyond the diving Barca keeper after a well-worked passing move.

4 EDIN DZEKO
Roma v Chelsea
Meets a long pass from Federico Fazio with a first-time, left-foot volley.

5 NEYMAR
Paris Saint-Germain v Bordeaux
Curls a pinpoint free-kick into the top corner from 35 yards.

6 SOFIANE BOUFAL
Southampton v West Bromwich Albion
Runs from inside his own half and curls a low shot inside the far post.

WINNERS

DIDIER DESCHAMPS
A 1-0 win over Bulgaria saw him beat the previous record of 41 wins as France coach.

ICELAND
With a population of 334,000 they are the smallest nation ever to qualify for a World Cup finals.

LIVERPOOL
Posted the biggest-ever away victory by an English club in the Champions League/ European Cup when they won 7-0 at Maribor.

HOLLAND
Having missed out on Euro 2016, they failed to qualify for successive tournaments for the first time in 32 years.

USA
Missed out on what would have been an eighth consecutive World Cup finals appearance.

SEYDOU DOUMBIA
Tore a tendon and expected to be out for two months while diving to try to win a penalty for Sporting against Barcelona.

LOSERS

"When you put this shirt on, it has to be with professionalism. While most of the players worked their asses off, others went to parties and would not train because of drunkenness"

Following Chile's failure to reach Russia 2018, Carla Pardo (right) – the wife of goalkeeper Claudio Bravo – lays the blame on the antics of midfielder Arturo Vidal and others

HEADLINER: Nasser Al Khelaifi

Bribery of FIFA official over TV deals denied

PSG's Qatari owner insists he is innocent

Qatar continues to be a thorn in the flesh of international football, with the latest round of controversy focusing on the purchase of World Cup television rights by beIN, the acquisitive sports media subsidiary of Al Jazeera.

The saga began on May 14, 2010 when leaders of the 2018 and 2022 World Cup bid committees presented their dossiers to FIFA in front of the world's media in Zurich.

In the November, Michel Platini, who was then a FIFA vice-president and head of UEFA, switched his 2022 vote from the USA to Qatar after a lunch hosted by French state president Nicolas Sarkozy and attended by the crown prince of Qatar, Tamin bin Haman Al Thani.

On December 2, 2010, FIFA's executive committee duly awarded 2022 to Qatar before also ordering a controversial date change for the finals to take place in November and December rather than the traditional June/July.

In the meantime, Chuck Blazer – angry that CONCACAF president Jack Warner had backed Qatar and not the US – lifted the lid on the Trinidadian's connivance with Qatar's Mohamed Bin Hammam in a vote-buying scam in the 2011 FIFA presidential election.

Blazer's whistle-blowing ultimately led to the FIFAGate investigation by the US Justice Department which has seen more than 40 senior football executives indicted on bribery and fraud charges.

The Office of the Swiss Attorney-General (OAG) became involved and launched its own investigations. These led to the overthrow and suspensions of not only Blatter and Platini but also of Jerome Valcke, who had been FIFA secretary-general from 2007 until the autumn of 2015.

On October 11, Valcke appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne against his sacking and 10-year ban for mishandling World Cup ticket sales and destroying possible evidence. A charge concerning the allocation of broadcasting rights was later dismissed.

Valcke emerged from the hearing insisting he was innocent of wrong doing, but instead of a clean run back to his new home in Barcelona he found himself running a new investigatory gauntlet.

The following day the OAG announced that criminal proceedings had been opened against Valcke, beIN's CEO Nasser Al Khelaifi and an unnamed businessman over "illegal advantages in connection with the allocation of broadcasting rights by beIN in certain countries for the 2018, 2022, 2026 and 2030 Football World Cups".

Al Khelaifi is also president of French club Paris Saint-Germain who made worldwide headlines in the summer by paying a record €222m for Barcelona's Brazilian superstar Neymar.

He is a member of the executive committee of the European Club Association by virtue of his joint status as a delegate on the UEFA professional football strategy council. And he is from Qatar, the Gulf state which has been under political, economic and "fake news" siege over the past six months from a Saudi-led four-nation coalition.

> The Swiss Attorney-General's office announced criminal proceedings had been opened against beIN's CEO Nasser Al Khelaifi, who is also president of Paris Saint-Germain

Powerful...Nasser Al Khelaifi (right) with Nicolas Sarkozy

Al Khelaifi and Valcke had negotiated a deal for the 2018 and 2022 rights weeks after Qatar won the 2022 hosting vote. Then, in January 2011, FIFA announced that Al Jazeera Sports — which later became beIN — had secured the rights for 23 territories across the Middle East and North Africa, including Saudi Arabia.

Raids on offices and properties including beIN's offices in Paris were carried out by agents from the French financial prosecutor's office and the national anti-corruption unit, as well as raids in Greece, Spain and Italy, where a luxury villa was seized and searched.

The OAG also revealed that Valcke was subject of a criminal procedure opened in March 2016 over World Cup ticketing allegations, from which the latest investigation had emanated.

Valcke and beIN have both denied all wrongdoing.

Keir Radnedge

"Democracy isn't good for sport. It eats into discipline. Players find other things to interest them. They become more laid-back"

Ex-Bulgaria striker Emil Kostadinov attributes his nation's lack of recent success to the fall of communism

Goncalo GUEDES (Valencia)

Valencia have been transformed this season by Marcelino, who steered them to second place in La Liga by October.

The former Villarreal boss became the club's sixth coach in two years when he was appointed at the end of last season, and a hallmark of his entertaining and competitive side has been the deployment of two players with something to prove: striker Simone Zaza and midfielder Geoffrey Kondogbia, who disappointed at West Ham United and Internazioinale respectively last season.

However, the biggest revelation has been Portuguese winger Guedes, who is on loan from Paris Saint-Germain.

Turning 21 in November, he has revelled in providing goals and assists. Most significantly, he scored both goals in his side's most significant result so far, a comprehensive 4-0 victory over Sevilla.

A teenage star for Benfica, who has represented Portugal at every level from under-15 upwards, Guedes moved to Paris in a €30m deal in January this year but was given few opportunities to display his talents. Now, after his impact on La Liga this autumn, he can expect a very different reception back in the French capital when he returns there at the season's end.

MAURO ICARDI (Internazionale)
After a falling out with Inter's ultras last season, the Argentinian striker repaired his relationship with the help of a hat-trick against city rivals Milan, including an injury-time winner from the penalty spot.

TIM WEAH (USA under-17s)
The United States went out of the World Under-17s to England at the quarter-final stage but not before the son of George Weah had left a lasting impression, not least with a hat-trick against Paraguay.

MARCO SILVA (Watford)
The Portuguese coach needed little time to make an impact at Watford, steering the perennial strugglers into the Premier League's top six.

ALVARO ODRIOZOLA (Real Sociedad)
An impressive debut for Spain at right-back saw talk of a move to Real Madrid, despite a release clause of €40m.

IVAN LEKO (Club Brugge)
The Croatian coach was appointed in the summer and steered his new club to top spot in the Belgian first division, eight points clear of second-placed Charleroi after 11 games.

JORGINHO (Napoli)
The midfield engine behind Napoli's table-topping run in Serie A. Born in Brazil but with Italian grandparents, he is now being chased by Brazil after failing to win a senior Italy cap.

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

The World Cup remains the ultimate prize – thanks to Ronaldo and Messi

Remember, remember the 10th of October – the night the World Cup was rescued from doom. Across two continents, two of the all-time greatest players of the world's favourite game were in perilous danger of being crushed in the mediocrity of qualifiers.

Whether you believe Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi is the finest footballer it would have been mortally wounding to next year's finals for these two to be absent from Russia.

The tournament is already battling to maintain its position of ultimate prestige against the growing financial and sporting weight of club football. Without the diamond brilliance of Messi and Ronaldo, next summer's event would have been grievously diminished at the worst possible moment.

Messi and Ronaldo are the kings. Their goalscoring feats, their medals, their glory and their magic are the heart of football's universe. Seven of the last 10 Champions League Finals have been captured by either player. Messi has scored 532 goals in 626 career matches. Ronaldo's tally is 613 goals in 873 matches. Both are approaching an astonishing 50 career hat-tricks.

Of the last nine Ballon d'Or prizes for the world's best player, Messi has five and Ronaldo four. Nobody else gets a look in. It's almost the same with *World Soccer*'s Player of the Year award with four each, the run broken only by Xavi when Spain won the World Cup in 2010.

The greater glory on the night of October 10 belonged to Messi, who had been criticised at home for his country's disastrous qualifying campaign, with Argentina lying in sixth place going into the final round of matches.

Many felt he didn't care enough about the national team, even though his quality had driven them to the 2014 World Cup Final, where they lost to Germany in extra time.

Messi's response was another burst of beauty and another mesmerising hat-trick, scored on a sodden pitch against Ecuador in the treacherous altitude of Quito. The TV images flashed round the world and brooked no argument about the message as his left-foot shots rippled into the net.

Inspirational... Cristiano Ronaldo

Argentina have the finest collection of forward players anywhere – Gonzalo Higuain, Paolo Dybala, Sergio Aguero, Mauro Icardi and Angel Di Maria to name just a few – yet they rely utterly on Messi.

On the last evening of the qualifying groups in Europe, the pressure was on Ronaldo too, though Portugal knew they had the back-up of a play-off if they failed to win at home to Switzerland.

> Without the diamond brilliance of Messi and Ronaldo, next summer's event would have been grievously diminished

Ronaldo didn't score on October 10 but his mere presence makes Portugal intimidating opposition and they swept past the Swiss with comfort.

There were other stories and dramas to savour in the crucial closing round of games, not least the continuation of the Iceland fairytale as they became the smallest-ever nation (population 300,000) to reach the World Cup finals.

Panama made it for the first time, too, although those of us who like a little mischief in sport were sorely disappointed that the possibility of a play-off duel between Syria and the USA failed to materialise.

Qualification for Egypt was welcome, while the European play-offs will have intense focus on four-time World Cup winners Italy.

These are the sideshows, however. What makes or breaks a World Cup are the hunger, performance and quality of the great players – and this is a World Cup which needs to be spectacular to retain its pre-eminence.

It could be special now that Messi and Ronaldo are present, and at the ages of 31 and 33 respectively next summer they should be further motivated by the knowledge that they are almost certain to be playing at their last tournament.

It could be special with Argentina and Portugal led by their heroes of the ages to inspire strong supporting casts.

It could be special for four European national teams in Germany, Spain, Belgium and France, and goalscoring stars elsewhere like Harry Kane and Robert Lewandowski.

It could be special with a revitalised Brazil and €222million man Neymar burning with ambition to prove he is now better than Messi and Ronaldo.

Let's hope so. WS

Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Is Messi's genius part of Argentina's problem?

There was something paradoxical about Lionel Messi's hat-trick away to Ecuador that secured Argentina's place at the World Cup.

On the one hand he was a player, through a combination of ability and will, dragging his country out of its crisis. It was a brilliant performance that will be talked about as long as Messi is talked about; the time when, at last, he rose to the occasion when his country really needed him.

And yet it is hard to avoid the thought that maybe it's his genius that has been part of the problem for Argentina all along.

To be clear, Argentina's problems are not Messi's fault but, as Paulo Dybala had noted before the draw against Peru, playing with a genius can be difficult.

In part, that's because they do things you don't expect, that others aren't capable of. But Dybala's wider point was that players at this level are not used to operating alongside somebody who is so obviously better than them. The temptation is always to give them the ball and to get out of the way, worried that you might be obstructing brilliance.

When Thierry Henry left Arsenal, Cesc Fabregas spoke of feeling relief in the sense that now when he got the ball all he was doing was picking the best option, rather than deciding whether Henry was the best option. The pressure of serving a great was no longer there any more.

Genius can have a stifling effect and, tactically, that can cause chaos.

Argentina, given their wealth of attacking talent, should never get to the point where it feels as though if you stop Messi you stop the whole side. But, of late, it has felt like that at times. After all, barring own goals, nobody other than Messi has scored for Argentina in 11 months.

He was directly involved in 47 per cent of their goals in qualifying, either by scoring himself or with the assist, despite playing only 10 of the 18 games. Everything went through him, everything was about him. It's natural, but it's unhealthy.

But Argentina are not like Liberia with George Weah, Bulgaria with Dimitar Berbatov, Togo with Emmanuel Adebayor or Wales with Gareth Bale. They have other options to relieve the pressure on Messi. In that sense they should be like the Argentina of 1986, when Diego Maradona was the obvious figurehead but was backed up by a gifted and forthright supporting cast.

"We knew we had the ace of spades, who at any moment could change the game," said team-mate Sergio Batista. "But we were clear – if Diego was covered, Burruchaga appeared and offered relief."

Maradona's extraordinary performances in Mexico – and the understandable but misleading suggestion that Argentina were the number 10 plus 10 others –have tended to disguise how well-balanced that side was, how Carlos Bilardo's back three created a platform on which Maradona could perform.

The problem caused by a player of Messi's talent is not restricted to Argentina. Successive forwards have struggled to fit in alongside him at Barcelona, with Henry, Samuel Eto'o, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Alexander Hleb and Alexis Sanchez all finding it difficult to play a secondary but not subservient role. Before the coming together of the superstar front three with Neymar and Luis Suarez, David Villa was probably the forward who played best alongside Messi, yet he never seemed entirely comfortable.

And that's at club level. With a national side, given the limited time available, building the necessary coalitions is that much harder.

Part of the reason for Brazil finishing 10 points clear at the top of the South American qualifying group for Russia can be attributed to coach Tite addressing a similar problem with his team. Instituting a more

Unstoppable... Lionel Messi takes on Peru

> Argentina's problems are not Messi's fault but, as Paulo Dybala noted before the draw against Peru, playing with a genius can be difficult

Figurehead...Diego Maradona at the 1986 World Cup

modern, coherent style than predecessors Dunga or Luiz Felipe Scolari, he reduced the dependence on Neymar. Oscar has spoken of feeling inhibited by Neymar during the 2014 World Cup, but Philippe Coutinho and Gabriel Jesus have thrived under Tite – as has Neymar, now that he is not expected to do everything himself.

And then there is the example of Sweden. At the Euros they were derided as Ibrahimovic and some others, but they have improved dramatically in the latest World Cup qualifying in the absence of their star.

In their book *The Numbers Game*, Chris Anderson and David Sally argue that football is a "weak-link" sport as opposed to, say, basketball, which is a "strong-link" sport. In basketball, one megastar can elevate the whole, but a football team, although it will benefit from a player such as Messi who can transform a game, will always be susceptible to a mistake made by its weakest performer.

Dybala's comment acknowledges not merely that Messi cannot do it all on his own, but that a link that is too strong risks having a deleterious effect of the links next to it.

Which is fine as theories go, but what's the solution?

A club side would probably end up selling their star and then try to increase the general quality of their squad, but a national team doesn't have that option. Clearly it would be ridiculous to suggest Messi should be dropped, so Jorge Sampaoli's task is to find a system that gets the best out of Messi while spreading the load.

While that's not easy, Tite's success with Brazil shows it can be done. WS

From left...Coutinho, Neymar and Jesus

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Home threat...Han Kwang-song

1 TEEN STAR BANNED FROM TV

Perugia's North Korean striker Han Kwang-song has been barred from appearing on Italian TV – by the authorities in his own country.

After scoring five goals in his first six Serie B games this season, the 19-year-old has been in demand with the media. But he could be forced to return home if he defies orders.

"[North Korea's] footballers have been prohibited from appearing on TV," says Perugia's president Massimiliano Santopadre. "Otherwise they would repatriate them. Han is scared."

2 MATCH FIXERS CRY FOUL

Prior to their Malawian Cup game against Chitipa United, Nchalo United bribed the officials to secure a match-winning outcome.

Yet despite their attempts to buy a result, Nchalo lost on penalties after a 1-1 draw and were knocked out.

Seething at the result, Nchalo attempted to get their money back by reporting the officials to the authorities – which is not the brightest move when you have tried to fix the match.

3 U2 WAIT THEIR TURN

Rock icons U2 delayed a gig in Buenos Aires so as not to clash with Argentina's dramatic World Cup qualifying win away to Ecuador.

The Irish band were scheduled to perform at the Estadio Unico de la Plata at the same time as Argentina were kicking off in Quito.

Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds opened the show as planned but then, with a giant screen in each corner of the stadium, the match was relayed live to the audience, before Bono and the band appeared on stage when the football had finished.

On hold...U2

4 PUTIN'S BIRTHDAY PRESENT

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and former Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldinho teamed up to play for the "Leader 65" team in a match to celebrate the 65th birthday of Russian president Vladimir Putin. The match was arranged by Kadyrov and was played in the Chechen capital of Grozny.

The Leader 65 team included former Russia internationals Valeri Karpin and Roman Shirokov, as well as Ronaldinho. They played against "Club Italia Master", a team of Italians that included Fabrizio Ravanelli and 1982 World Cup hero Paolo Rossi.

Leader 65 won 6-3.

Leader's leader... Ramzan Kadyrov (in white)

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

IFAB is racing towards VAR disaster

To VAR or not to VAR? That is the thorny question to be considered at the general meeting of the International Football Association Board in December.

This is not the meeting which is charged with deciding whether the video referee system should be used at the World Cup finals in Russia next year – that decision is scheduled to be made by the annual meeting next spring. But it is inevitable that – if only behind the scenes and beyond reach of the formal meeting minutes – the British associations, FIFA and the myriad of hangers-on, advisers, committee members and self-publicists will kick the issue around.

Laws made in haste tend to be bad laws and football's strength down the years has been the conservatism of the law-making body. For years FIFA has administered the work of IFAB and little else. But, in the post-scandal reforms, the British associations allowed FIFA to swallow up IFAB as a price to pay for keeping the voting balance between the founding fathers and the rest of the world.

This opened the door to all the advisory aides – who need to justify their existence – and all manner of quackery which never sees the light of day. When it does, such as Marco Van Basten's proposal to scrap offside, it is shot down before breaching the agenda walls.

The role IFAB now holds, as a subsidiary of FIFA, has also offered president Gianni Infantino the opportunity to press the case for the use of video referees at the World Cup in Russia.

This time last year, before VAR had been rolled out in full-scale league trials, Infantino was perfectly justified in raising that possibility. The trouble is, he has continued to promote a World Cup deadline in ever more strident tones while the evidence of trials, and from Europe in particular, has been less than satisfactory. Both on-pitch and technological practicalities have caused problems and raised doubts about whether solutions can be found to prevent FIFA looking foolish during the finals.

The World Cup is the game's greatest showpiece – and that was the crucial factor in persuading Sepp Blatter to change his mind about goal-line technology. Blatter was among the appalled spectators in Bloemfontein in 2010 who saw Frank Lampard's shot ricochet down from the crossbar, hit the ground behind the goal-line and spin out. The one man who did not see it was Uruguayan referee Jorge Larrionda.

Back in Johannesburg, Blatter summoned a media roundtable at which he announced his change of mind "because the rest of the world is laughing at us".

The danger now is that muddled introduction of the video referee at the World Cup will see the world laughing at FIFA again.

Hellmut Krug, who is overseeing the VAR trials in the Bundesliga, says: "Making the system an effective tool must take a season and not just a few match days. It's true that grey areas remain because the system is put into effect by human beings, not by robots, but we can already see that decision-making is improving."

England's Dermot Gallagher, a key adviser to IFAB, and FIFA's refereeing head Massimo Busacca – both former international referees – insist that VAR will not create refereeing perfection but will reduce the number of avoidable errors.

However, Bayern Leverkusen coach Heiko Herrlich is one of those who has said he would be happier "living with the few mistakes we suffer over a season" because, in any case, players and managers make far more mistakes than refs."

The first suggestion of a chink in the IFAB armour came when Jonathan Ford, the chief executive of the FA of Wales and a senior member of IFAB, said: "My major concern is we are rushing into this. To have it at the World Cup finals is quite a dangerous thing to do.

"It's a high-risk strategy if it all goes wrong and has to be booted out afterwards."

Decisions by IFAB require a three-quarters majority. That means six of the eight votes. It also means that the British quartet can block any FIFA proposal and vice-versa. The likelihood is that a Yes/No

> The danger now is that muddled introduction of the video referee at the World Cup will see the world laughing at FIFA

No goal...England are denied in 2010

decision will not be thrashed out in IFAB's AGM but that a consensus will be reached behind the scenes in advance and then rubber-stamped by everyone.

In the United States, where video assistance in sport is commonplace, the start of trials was delayed from the opening until the middle of the season because, according to refereeing manager Howard Webb, "we still needed time for training and installation of technical equipment in the stadia".

In the US the video assistant is a member of the travelling referee team and works from a studio in the stadium; in Germany one assistant is at a match, the rest are all in a central control room.

At the Confederations Cup in Russia in June – where VAR snags threatened to overshadow the tournament itself – the video referee was of a different nationality to the match referee, surely a nonsense and a recipe for communications confusion.

The VAR system also increases the power of players over the ref. If players in the World Cup run at the referee claiming, say, a handball or a foul or an offside, can he resist the pressure to consult, just in case his own opinion was mistaken?

Few people doubt that, once the system has been refined, it should be essential at major tournaments. But the prospects of achieving that in time for Russia appear limited.

In theory, IFAB is supposed to be independent. This is the time and the cause to put that independence to the test. WS

Warner's time games

Jack Warner continues to fight on. The former president of CONCACAF is wanted in the US to stand trial on corruption charges in the FIFAGate investigation and remains just that.

The 73-year-old Warner hired an expensive team of British lawyers to fight his case through the courts of Trinidad & Tobago and it has been slow going.

The one-time FIFA powerbroker and World Cup "vote specialist", quit the game in 2011 rather than face ballot-rigging charges in that year's presidential election. Four years later he was indicted by the US Justice Department on charges of racketeering, wire fraud and money-laundering over 24 years.

His most recent delaying tactic was to seek a judicial review of the extradition process. This was rejected in the conclusion of a 50-page ruling in the high court delivered by Justice James Aboud. Warner is expected to appeal and thus prevent the process reverting immediately to the Port-of-Spain Magistrate's Court.

Warner had claimed the case against him is politically motivated and has accused the US of seeking revenge because it lost to Qatar in its bid to host the 2022 World Cup.

He is not the only refusenik. US lawyers are also struggling to obtain the extradition of former South American supremo Nicolas Leoz as well as Brazilian federation president Marco Polo del Nero and a predecessor, Ricardo Teixeira.

Delaying tactics...Jack Warner

Presumably they all hope that, with FIFAGate sentences due to be delivered in the next few months, they can proclaim that – with so much more information then in the public domain – it would be impossible for them to be assured a fair trial.

This will run and run.

"We needed to win, them too. What pact? That's speculation"

Peru assistant coach Nolberto Solano pours scorn on claims that his team and Colombia colluded in a 1-1 draw in a World Cup qualifier, a result that was advantageous to both sides

HEADLINER: Gerard Pique

Barcelona defender backs independence vote

Barca caught up in Catalonia crisis

Football has found itself caught up in the violent exacerbation of Catalonia's always-uneasy relationship with the central Spanish establishment.

Going right back to the first half of the last century, Barcelona has appreciated its status as defender of the Catalan flag and capitalised on it. Now the dawning of a sombre new reality after the independence referendum of October 1 has thrown the club onto the back foot.

The Spanish Civil War brought a viciously sinister edge to the Barcelona/Madrid rivalry which has never vanished, even during good economic times. If anything, Spain's increasing financial health since its European Union accession in 1986 has widened the industrial and political chasm.

Catalonia generates around 20 per cent of Spanish wealth and its noisiest political parties have capitalised on increasingly protectionist sentiments. Hence the pressure for an independence ballot. The first, in 2015, led to judicial punishment pursued by the government in Madrid against Catalan leaders. The latest brought violence to the streets.

And while footballers generally avoid political comment, Barcelona defender Gerard Pique has never hidden his belief in Catalans' right to vote on the issue.

Via a tweet in Catalan, the 30-year-old said: "From today until Sunday we should express ourselves peacefully. Don't give them any excuse. It's what they want. And sing high and strong. #Votarem [We will vote]."

Pique's political independence has long earned derisory whistles and jeers on away grounds in Spain, though the former world and European champion has never expressed an opinion about whether he would want an independent Catalonia. Only that Catalans should have the right to decide for themselves.

But that nuance was lost on antagonistic fans who turned out with placards of protest to target him at a national-team training session days after the referendum.

On the day of the referendum, Barca were scheduled to play Las Palmas at Camp Nou. As reports emerged of ballot-box seizures and police violence, some fans demanded that the club stand up for the battered and bruised of Catalonia and refuse to play.

But Barcelona were told that forfeiting the game would incur the loss of the three points plus a further three by way of punishment. Hence the decision by president Josep Bartomeu and the board to play the match behind closed doors.

Las Palmas lost 3-0 and were branded "fascists" by some for their own gesture of playing with a small Spanish flag sewn on to their shirts.

Pique said afterwards: "There were arguments to play the game just as there were arguments to not play the game. In the end the league and Las Palmas wanted to play the game. There were all sorts of opinions and in the end the club made the decision to play the game.

"My personal opinion doesn't matter. Lots of players expressed their own different opinions before the game. The club decided to play and we united behind that decision. But I understand perfectly why a lot of the supporters think the team should not have played.

"For many years people could not vote here and this is a right that should be defended by all means within the law possible. It was very difficult to play without our supporters and after all that has happened throughout Catalonia. It was my worst experience as a player."

Debate has since raged over the club's potential status in the event of Catalan independence as they would hardly be happy in a league where their greatest rivals were Espanyol and Girona rather than Real and Atletico Madrid. However, talk of an "independent" Barca leading Europe's elite clubs in a breakaway super league appeared even more outlandish.

Initially, an independent Catalonia would be beyond world football's political frontiers and the prospect is that the team's stars would abandon ship.

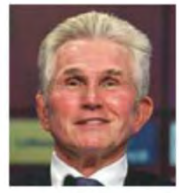
Some might want to rally to the flag, but such gestures are rare.

Keir Radnedge

> "It was very difficult to play without our supporters...it was my worst experience as a player"
>
> Gerard Pique

Empty...Gerard Pique taking on Las Palmas

"It's a matter of friendship. I'm doing this for Bayern and because of my close ties with the club"



Seventy-two-year-old Jupp Heynckes returns for a fourth spell at the Bayern Munich controls

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

New man...Hein Vanhaezebrouck

Done deal... Mikel Merino

EUROPE

JUPP HEYNCKES returned to coach Bayern Munich until the end of the season following the sacking of Carlo Ancelotti. More, page 70.

DIEGO COSTA completed a €66m move back to Atletico Madrid from Chelsea but cannot play until January 1, when the club's transfer ban comes to an end.

Newcastle United completed a permanent deal for loanee midfielder **MIKEL MERINO** of Borussia Dortmund.

Former Milan and Internazioinale boss **LEONARDO**, whose previous roles also include that of director of football at Paris Saint-Germain, was appointed coach of Turkish top-flight side Antalyaspor.

PAKO AYESTARAN took over as coach of Las Palmas when Manolo Marquez resigned after just six La Liga games in charge.

HEIN VANHAEZEBROUCK left Gent and replaced Rene Weiler as coach of Belgian rivals Anderlecht.

Belgian **TOM SAINTFIET** was appointed national coach of Malta.

OWEN COYLE was named manager of Scottish Premiership club Ross County.

AFRICA

Former African Footballer of the Year **RABAH MADJER** replaced Lucas Alcaraz as coach of Algeria.

ASIA

Aston Villa forward **ROSS McCORMACK** joined A-League club Melbourne City on loan.

Argentinian striker **MAURO ZARATE** joined Al Nasr in the United Arab Emirates on loan from Premier League side Watford until the end of the season.

Loan...Ross McCormack

Play-off... Zlatko Dalic

Croatia turn to Dalic

ZLATKO DALIC replaced Ante Cacic as coach of Croatia after a 1-1 draw at home to Finland in their penultimate World Cup qualifier. A 2-0 victory in Ukraine in his first game ensured a place in the play-offs, where they now face Greece.

Dalic had been coaching Al Ain in the UAE and guided them to the 2016 Asian Champions League Final.

International end ...Arjen Robben

Robben bows out for Holland

ARJEN ROBBEN, whose two goals in his last game were not enough to help Holland reach the World Cup, announced his international retirement at 33 years of age after 96 caps.

OUT

EUROPE

RONALD KOEMAN, who spent £140m on players in the summer, was dismissed by Everton after they won two of their first nine Premier League games. Leicester City sacked **CRAIG SHAKESPEARE**.

GORDON STRACHAN left his job as Scotland manager following two failed qualification campaigns.

Metz sacked coach **PHILIPPE HINSCHBERGER** with the club bottom of Ligue 1.

YANNICK FERRERA was sacked by Belgian side Mechelen, while **JOSE RIGA** left Cercle Brugge.

SOUTH AMERICA

JUAN ANTONIO PIZZI resigned as coach of Chile after they failed to reach the World Cup finals.

CONCACAF

BRUCE ARENA quit as USA coach after World Cup elimination.

ASIA

TONY POPOVIC quit as coach of Western Sydney Wanderers a week before the start of the A-League season.

Departed... Gordon Strachan

"It's dirty and disgusting and ugly, but it's ours"

Alexi Lalas reflects on Washington's RFK Stadium as DC United prepared for their final home game before relocating to a new stadium next season

OBITUARIES

Jozsef TOTH (1929-2017)

First time...Toth (circled) lines up with Hungary before their group game against Germany at the 1954 World Cup

The former winger and inside forward's death at 88 has extinguished the last living link with the legendary Hungarian team of the 1950s.

Born in Mersevat, 150 miles west of Budapest, Toth was unusual in the national squad in that he played all his club career with suburban Csepel Vasas, rather than Honved or MTK. Between 1948 and 1961 he scored 78 goals in 296 games for the team, who he helped to win the national title in 1959.

He made his Hungary debut in a 1-1 draw with Bulgaria in Sofia in October 1953, but did not play again until a scoring appearance in the 7-1 win over England in Budapest the following year.

In total he managed five goals in 12 appearances for the national team between 1953 and 1957, playing alongside all-time greats such as Ferenc Puskas, Sandor Kocsis, Nandor Hidegkuti and Zoltan Czibor. However, despite common misconceptions, he was not a relative of his international team-mate Mihaly Toth.

In Switzerland at the 1954 World Cup, he scored in Hungary's 8-3 thrashing of a deliberately weakened West Germany in the group phase. But he was then injured during the 4-2 victory over Brazil, in what became known as the "Battle of Berne" and therefore missed the rematch with Germany in the Final, in which Hungary led 2-0 before losing 3-2.

A sports ground in his home town carries his name, while Istvan Tarlos – the mayor of Budapest, where Toth was hailed as an honorary citizen in 2014 – paid tribute to his "exceptional club loyalty and exemplary human behaviour".

His death was marked by a one-minute silence before the following weekend's Hungarian league action.

Keir Radnedge

Serie A winner... Eugenio Bersellini

Jimmy MAGEE (1935-2017)
The renowned Irish commentator, who covered 12 World Cups, was a regular voter in the annual *World Soccer* awards and was nicknamed "The Memory Man" for his encyclopedic knowledge of sport.

Eugenio BERSELLINI (1936-2017)
Spent five seasons in charge of Internazionale, leading them to the Serie A title in 1980 and two Italian Cup triumphs. Had spells as coach of Sampdoria, Torino, Fiorentina, Bologna and Libya's national team, and also won the Libyan domestic title with Al Ittihad.

INDONESIA

Keeper dies after collision during game

Choirul Huda, a goalkeeper with Indonesian top-flight side Persela Lamongan, died after a collision with a team-mate during a league fixture.

The 38-year-old collided with defender Ramon Rodrigues and an opponent as he came off his line to challenge for the ball during a game against Semen Padang. He was rushed to hospital where he died.

Tragedy...keeper Choiril Huda

A statement from a doctor at the Dr Soegiri Lamongan Hospital said Huda suffered a "traumatic collision" which led to a cardiac arrest.

Huda had played for Persela since 1999, making more than 500 appearances, and the club described him as "the Real Legend of Persela".

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Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Deplorable behaviour... Greg Clarke (left) and Martin Glenn

Same old deadbeats at the Football Association

"He's the fool of the family, make him a parson!" was an old Victorian jibe. For parson, read sports minister.

The present incumbent is one Tracey Crouch who, when faced with the deplorable behaviour of the two FA executives, Martin Glenn and Greg Clarke, over the torrid Eniola Aluko affair, could do no better than declare: "I hope that the FA learns lessons from this whole sorry saga, to ensure that all in the sport and the wider public have faith in their processes and procedures. We have been clear that we expect world leading standards of governance from all our national sports governing bodies."

That told 'em! At least the shadow minister, Rosena Allin-Khan, was far more assertive, trumpeting: "It is clear the leadership of the Football Association is incapable of dealing with allegations of bullying and racism." She said she has lost confidence in the FA's leadership team – that's if we ever had it at all. She demanded that "the board need to act quickly and decisively to take the FA in a new direction". Some chance!

> "The FA is incapable of dealing with allegations of bullying and racism"

Alas we are struck with the same old deadbeats whose evidence to the Collins Committee was described by the SNP's Brendan O'Hara as "jaw droppingly inept". Needless to say, had there been a sequel it would probably have been a case of deadbeats out, deadbeats in.

So perhaps those old lines of Hilaire Belloc might be all too dismally apposite: "Always keep a hold of nurse. For fear of finding something worse."

The truth is that since Stanley Rous abandoned the post of FA secretary in 1962 to become the president of FIFA, there hasn't been a single impressive incumbent to replace him.

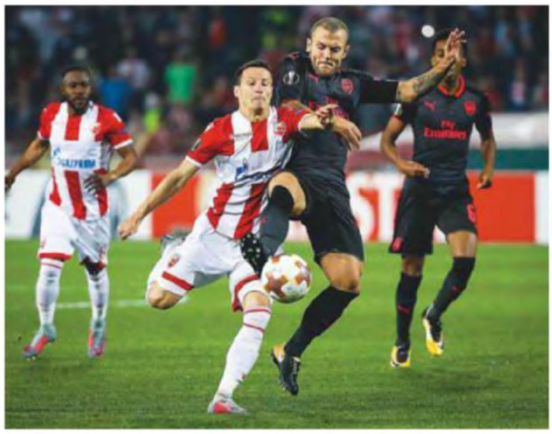
Time to back Jack

At least and at last, Jack Wilshere got all of 13 minutes on the field as an Arsenal substitute at Everton, where he did well enough. This after several outstanding second-string games, the latest of them in the 1-0 Europa League victory over Red Star in Belgrade.

The star of the Arsenal in the 5-2 win at Goodison Park was another midfielder, Mesut Ozil, who headed one of the Gunners' goals. Arsene Wenger can only hope that Ozil maintains such form – but his contract is up in the summer, and he already seems to have indicated that he would like to go to Manchester United.

Wenger has recently spoken warmly of Wilshere, who for me should certainly be in the current disappointing England team. I doubt the current unimpressive England manager Gareth Southgate would dare to pick him when he is not a first-team regular, but it is hard to see any other England player who passes the ball with such imagination. Not to mention the important goals that he can score at times.

This is yet another player whose contract runs out at the end of the season but it would be sheer folly for Wenger to let him slip away – with no fee payable, at that.



Red Star...Jack Wilshire (right) in Europa League action in Belgrade

Struggle...Gylfi Sigurdsson (right) with Wayne Rooney

Koeman has left Everton in a muddle

Now that Ronald Koeman has left Everton, hardly trailing clouds of glory, one hopes that 20-year-old Ademola Lookman will get a run on the right wing.

Everton spent a lot of money in the summer. They bought a fine young goalkeeper from Sunderland in Jordan Pickford, who is surely a future England player, and one of the most talented midfielders in the Premiership in Gylfi Sigurdsson. The Icelander, however, has been bizarrely pushed out of the middle where he belongs to the left flank.

For far too much of the time the team operated without true wingers. Certainly the team misses the dynamic goalscoring of Romelu Lukaku, a striker well suited to walk in the footsteps of the likes of Dixie Dean and Tommy Lawton.

Dominic Calvert-Lewin is too young to carry such a burden and this is a problem any ensuing manager will find hard to solve. And certainly before the transfer market opens again in January.

A footballing rarity

At struggling Sunderland, whom I saw muddle their way to a scrappy draw at Brentford recently, there is that rarity: a footballer with a university degree.

The player is Duncan Watmore, his degree came from Newcastle University, and he is a right-winger of pace, intelligence and menace.

Certainly Brentford couldn't hold him and one sympathises with so accomplished a player doomed to operate in a plodding team like this.

Degree...Duncan Watmore (sky blue)

Brook, City's forgotten man

After 78 years, Eric Brook's all-time scoring record for Manchester City, 177 goals, was matched by Sergio Aguero. But where the Argentinian is a multi-millionaire, Brook played at the time when the top wage was £8 a week in season. It would today translate into substantially more, but mere chicken feed by comparison with what a player of Brook's ability would earn today.

A Yorkshireman who made his name playing at Barnsley, he would have gone down the mine like his father had it not been for his footballing ability and his devastating left foot.

Plenty of power, even though he stood only 5ft 7in, he joined City with Barnsley team-mate Fred Tilson for £8,000 in 1928, and won both cup and league.

The autobiography of footballer and columnist Ivan Sharpe tells the tale of going into St Peter's cathedral in Rome in 1934.

"Isn't it majestic?" asked Sharpe. To which Brook responded: "Somebody's pinched my effing boots."

His free-kicks were deadly, which he proved against Italy at Highbury when goalkeeper Carlo Ceresoli chose not to have a defensive wall.

Man City record ...Eric Brook

The game's dirty secrets

More dirt is being swept from under football's carpet, this time to do with what American colleges call "hazing".

An inquiry is looking into examples, some of them plainly lurid, such as that involving George Blackstock when he was a 16-year-old youngster at Stoke City. He has long claimed that he was dragged into the first-team dressing room and painfully assaulted by the team's goalkeeper Peter Fox, who has always denied it.

Then there is also the tale of poor Paul Scholes, who as a Manchester United junior was shoved into a huge tumble drier. Other United players of the same generation have also complained of maltreatment.

● Read Brian Glanville's weekly online column at worldsoccer.com

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eye witness

Steve Menary reports

LATVIA

Match fixing leaves the domestic game in a mess

New federation head will have a big job to do

A former high-ranking KGB officer in Riga before the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Guntis Indriksons is one of Europe's longest-serving national association heads. But as he prepares to step down next year, things are getting messy.

With Latvia's FIFA ranking currently at a record low of 148, Indriksons pledged to stand aside in March following a 5-0 thrashing by Georgia in Tbilisi that ended with the resignation of national coach Marians Pahars. Then, ahead of their next fixture, at home to Portugal in June, bailiffs moved into the Skonto Stadium in Riga and removed all the seats.

The stadium debacle can be traced back to the heady days of Latvian football, when Indriksons first took charge.

In 1990, six years before he was elected president of Latvian Football Federation (LFF), Indriksons set up the Skonto group of companies. Skonto FC was the group's football arm and became the country's dominant side, winning 14 titles in a row between 1991 and 2004. The company built the Skonto Stadium, and in 2000 the club and the national team moved in.

However, the conglomerate's fortunes faded and in 2010 Indriksons sold the football team. They then lost control of the stadium which, according to a TV investigation, was later acquired by an Estonian, Allan Selter, and sold on to the Adventika Group. In early 2016, Adventika leased the stadium to SIA Fitnesa Parks but Selter retained ownership of the stadium furniture. When the three sides fell out, Selter sent in the bailiffs in April and Adventika called in the state police.

A last-minute deal saw the seats re-installed in time for the visit of Cristiano Ronaldo and co, and a 3-0 defeat for Pahars' replacement Aleksandrs Starkovs – who had steered the side to the Euro 2004 finals and was taking charge of the national team for a third time – was just about bearable for Latvia's weary fans.

Skonto provided the backbone of that 2004 team, and many of the players – including Pahars, who scored 43 goals in 137 league games for Southampton in England – subsequently went abroad. Last year Skonto were denied a licence and, though a youth operation struggles on, the team is effectively dead. And these days the overseas players in Starkovs' squad – such as the recently retired Artjoms Rudnevs, who was a striker with Cologne in Germany – struggle for game time with their clubs, which causes serious problems for the national coach.

"Football is not mathematics. There's no formula," sighs a phlegmatic Pahars. "There's many reasons for the current problems. We all come from the Soviet system. There is no good and bad, but it did work. Now, some of the players are technically not ready to be in the national team yet."

Pahars is not advocating a return to Soviet times, but plenty of Latvians could be forgiven for dwelling on economically safer times. Since joining the Euro in 2014 prices have gone up faster than wages and he admits: "In Latvia they are angry people. Not just in football, but everything. They have to be more happy because they start to blame other people."

Pahars' departure from the national team after four years saddened many fans. Despite losing four of their first five World Cup qualifiers, including a humiliating 2-0 defeat to Faroe Islands in Riga, LFF secretary Janis Mezeckis suggests that Pahars did not need to quit. But after the Tbilisi loss, Indriksons told a Latvian radio station: "My personal opinion is that the coach has to be changed."

> "The federation think legal betting is for idiots, but if you have won the money fairly what's the problem?"
>
> **Former LFF press officer, Krisjanis Klavins**

While some observers believe that Indriksons could change his mind about standing down before the LFF congress in April 2018, two rival candidates for the presidential post have emerged: current national-team captain Kaspars Gorkss, and minister of the interior Rihards Kozlovskis, who is being championed by Mezeckis. Kozlovskis has no football experience and represents a retreat to the Soviet era, when politicians ran football, while Gorkss is also linked to the establishment as his father works at the LFF.

This will be only the second time since Indriksons took power in 1996 that the clubs will have a choice of candidates in a presidential election. The last time was in 2016, when former LFF press officer

Power...Guntis Indriksons

Ready...Latvia's dressing room prior to their World Cup qualifier at home to Switzerland in September

Krisjanis Klavins stood as an advocate for greater transparency in the LFF's finances. Klavins also wanted to tackle what is arguably Latvian football's biggest embarrassment: facilities.

"The facilities here are a disaster," says Girts Mihelsons, the co-founder of Riga-based side METTA, who started as a youth team in 2006 and now play in the top-flight Virsliga.

For four months every winter, youth training from under-13 upwards has to go inside, but Latvia has just two indoor sports halls – and both are in Riga. In provincial towns such as Ventspils and Liepaja, youth players have to train on hard floors in school halls.

The two sports halls in Riga are split into four, using curtains or netting, and youth

Game on...Latvia's Nikita Kolesovs (left) tries to stop Cristiano Ronaldo during the 3-0 loss to Portugal in June

2017 Virsliga

JELGAVA
Cup winners last year, they have one of the league's bigger budgets (between €700,000 and €800,000) but were knocked out of this season's Europa League without scoring a goal. Club president is Latvian construction magnate Maris Peilans.

LIEPAJA
Ex-international Maris Verpakovskis is president but they are mostly financed by the city council. Got through one round of Europa League qualifiers this term before losing to Lithuania's Suduva. Won the Latvian Cup in October.

METTA
Founded in 2006 as a youth side by Girts Mihelsons and Andris Riherts, they offer a dozen University of Latvia scholarships each season to students, who make up most of the first XI. All coaches must speak Latvian.

RFS
Finished third in the second-tier First League in 2015 but went up after Skonto were denied a licence and runners-up Valmeira turned down promotion due to a lack of funds.

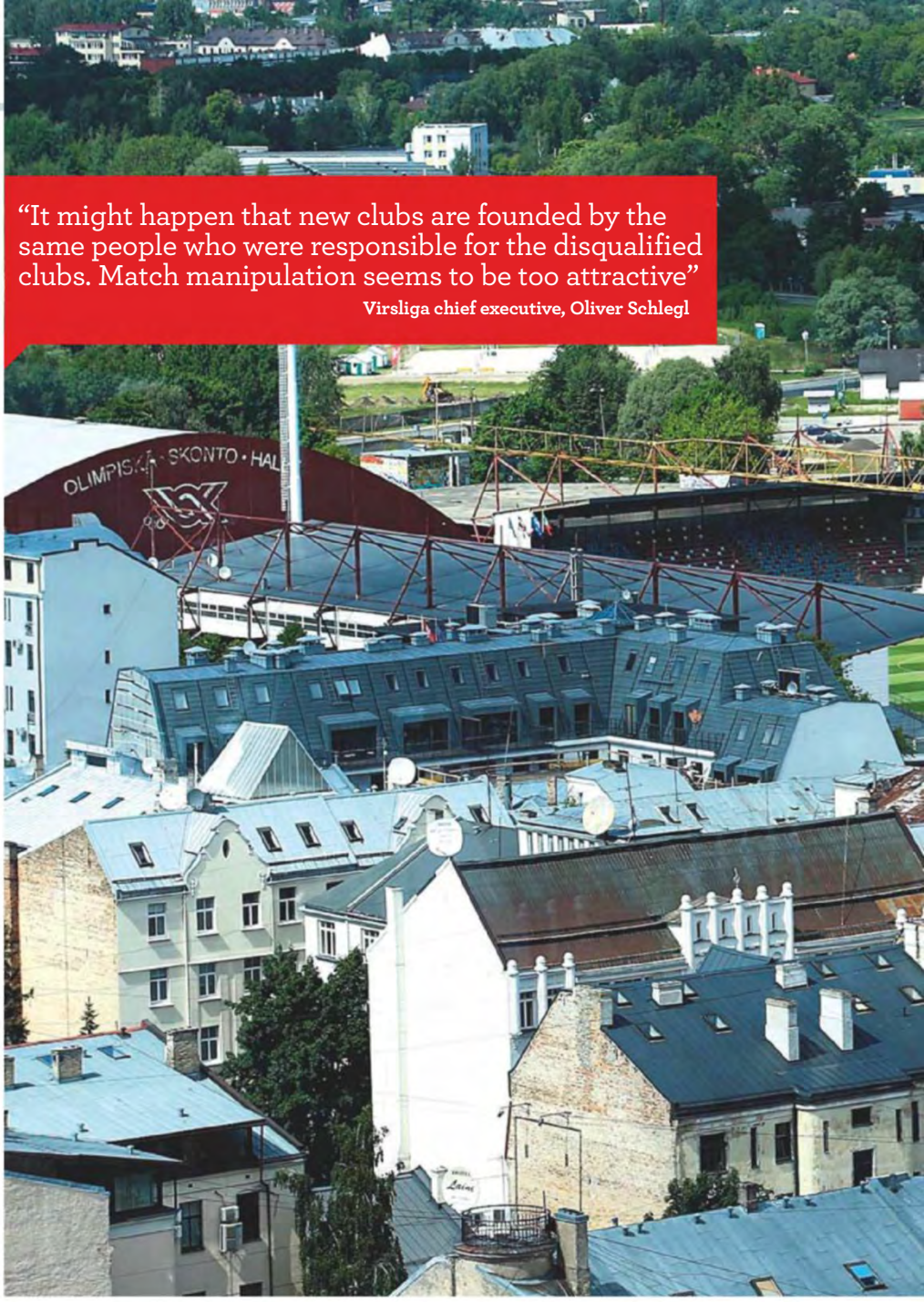
RIGA
Owned by a big-spending but mysterious Russian businessman, they play in the Skonto Stadium. They tempted veteran international captain Kaspars Gorkss home this summer and spent pre-season in Dubai.

SPARTAKS JURMALA
The reigning champions are owned by low-key businessman Spartaks Melkumjans, who has an Armenian father and a Russian mother. The club achieved success on a modest budget (around €500,000 to €600,000) but were knocked out of this season's Champions League qualifiers at the first hurdle.

VENTSPILS
From the Baltic port city and founded in 1997, they are the Virsliga's oldest club. Backed by Latvian oligarch and local mayor Aivars Lembergs, they are one of the richest teams in the Baltic with an annual budget of more than €1m. They have won six titles since 2006, with the last in 2014.

BABITE
Babite started the season but were disqualified for match fixing.

> "It might happen that new clubs are founded by the same people who were responsible for the disqualified clubs. Match manipulation seems to be too attractive"
>
> **Virsliga chief executive, Oliver Schlegl**



National home... Skonto Stadium in Riga

players cannot practise crossing the ball as there is no space.

Klavins wanted to use some of the LFF's annual €7million budget – the biggest of any Latvian sports association – to install a swathe of temporary inflatable halls. However, his challenge floundered after attempts to get votes cast anonymously were quashed, with Latvia's club sides having to vote in front of Indriksons and other LFF officials.

Klavins was easily beaten and remains undecided about running next year after being widely disparaged by the LFF last time for alleged involvement in match fixing, although no charges were brought.

"The federation think legal betting is for idiots, but if you have won the money fairly what's the problem?" asks Klavins, who clearly understands gambling's intricacies better than the LFF.

Match fixing has plagued the Latvian game for years. In the last two years, Daugava Riga, Daugava Daugavpils and Jurmala have all disappeared or been denied Virsliga licences due to fixing.

An anti-match-fixing law was introduced last year but no one has yet to be prosecuted under the new rules, while some players and staff who were involved

Latvian Cup semi-final... RFS (in blue) and Ventspils

MOVERS & SHAKERS

KASPARS GORKSS
Latvia's captain, now back home playing for Riga at the age of 35 after nine years in England with, among others, Queens Park Rangers and Reading.

GUNTIS INDRIKSONS
After more than two decades in power, the former high-ranking KGB operative has finally agreed to stand down as LFF president next year.

MARIANS PAHARS
The country's greatest player, scoring 15 goals in 75 games, quit as national coach in March and is currently seeking a return to club management.

ALEKSANDRS STARKOVS
Back in the national hot seat for a third time. In his first spell – between 2001 and 2004 – he took Latvia to Euro 2004 with a sensational play-off win over 2002 World Cup semi-finalists Turkey.

OLIVER SCHLEGL
A rare foreigner running a domestic league, the German former football agent took over as Virsliga chief executive in January.

in earlier scandals are still in the game.

Earlier this year, UEFA contacted the LFF over a suspicious pre-season Winter Cup game in February between Babite and Lithuanian side Suduva. Two months later, Babite's 4-0 loss at home to Ventspils also was flagged up when Federbet, which monitors Latvian football, picked up high levels of betting activity.

Babite sacked two players but neither were in the squad for the game against Ventspils, whose manager Paul Ashworth said: "Babite were bottom and we beat them 10-0 last time, so I think we were a good bet to win."

Since then, a crackdown on fixing has reduced the Virsliga to seven clubs after Babite were expelled in July. In addition, Jekabpils/JSC and Ogre were disqualified from the second-tier First League, while Raita were ejected from the third tier and Sirius and Salaspils were removed from the bottom level.

Education...METTA offer scholarships to young Latvians

Monitoring helped but the LFF also obtained testimony from players including one from Ogre, which implicated head coach Igor Troickis. He denied involvement but an appeal upheld a three-year ban on him and three players.

"They didn't arrest anyone," says agent Edgars Ikstens. "Some players [implicated] even joined other teams. Basically they will do the same thing in another club next year.

"The LFF will kick out a few clubs every year. In the media and UEFA work groups they are telling us that they are fighting match fixing but they are not."

Unsurprisingly, the Virsliga's new chief executive, Oliver Schlegl, feels differently but admits the battle is far from won. "Looking into the history of other eliminated clubs, you can assume the clubs will disappear completely," he says.

"But it might happen that new clubs are founded by the same people who were responsible for the disqualified clubs. Match manipulation seems to be too attractive."

Schlegl wants to introduce a controversial presumption of guilt for match fixing, meaning that a player or club must prove they are innocent. "We need something that makes people realise they must take the Virsliga and the federation seriously," he adds.

The LFF introduced rules forcing lower league clubs to have a coach with a Level C badge; that will soon rise to Level B. However, one coach working outside the top flight revealed: "They are doing this because they somehow believe it will reduce match fixing. And yet those previously banned for match fixing are coaching at a high level at Virsliga clubs."

Sadly, as Guntis Indriksons finally prepares to exit with the FIFA ranking at a fresh nadir after a woeful World Cup qualifying campaign, there are few other attractions in Latvian football. WS

6 of the best Champions League debutants

Nick Bidwell profiles some of the competition's best newcomers

1 Borja MAYORAL

REAL MADRID

Back at the Bernabeu after a disappointing loan spell in Germany with Wolfsburg, the striker is certainly enjoying his return to HQ. He made his Champions League bow in September as a sub against APOEL and a few days later he scored his first senior goal for Real in a 3-1 La Liga win at Real Sociedad. With an ability to forage for openings and clinically convert chances, a selection of his greatest hits speak for themselves: the 50 goals he racked up for the club's youth team in 2014-15; the record he holds as the leading marksman in the history of the UEFA Youth League with 17 goals; and the top goalscorer award he picked up at the 2015 European Under-19 Championship. A diabetic, he is the son of a *Madrileno* butcher.

2 Jerry ST JUSTE

FEYENOORD

The 21-year-old centre-back joined the reigning Eredivisie champions from Heerenveen in July, despite offers from Ajax and PSV. After opting for a four-year deal with the Rotterdammers, he told a TV reporter: "I've always liked Feyenoord. It's a great club with fantastic fans. For me it's definitely the best club in Holland." Those comments were the spark for something of a media stir after one of his former youth coaches revealed he had been an Ajax supporter as a boy – which is not the sort of revelation to enamour him to hard-core Feyenoord fans. Christened "Jeremiah", he is a powerful and tenacious marker, strong in the air and assured in his distribution. He has represented Holland from under-17 to under-21 level so far and cannot be far away from a senior call-up. His elder brother, Yoshua, is a Dutch futsal international.

3 Dan-Axel ZAGADOU

BORUSSIA DORTMUND

In his first season with BVB following a Bosman free move from Paris Saint-Germain, the France under-18 skipper has already made his presence felt, filling in superbly at left-back for the injured Marcel Schmelzer and Raphael Guerreiro. It's been quite a start at the Westfalenstadion for a teenager who had never played professionally before arriving in Germany and is a central defender by trade. An intimidating package of power and athleticism, he came up through the Creteil-Lusitanos soccer school in the southern suburbs of the French capital and was headhunted by PSG at the age of just 12. Rumoured to be on the watch-list of Manchester City, RB Leipzig and Wolfsburg, among others, he finally chose to make Dortmund his new home, signing a five-year deal.

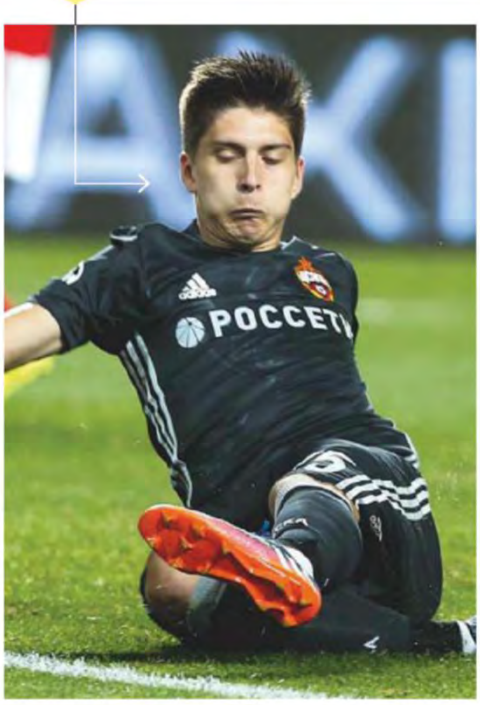
4 Blas RIVEROS

BASLE

A 5-0 demolition of Benfica was not only one of Basle's best-ever continental performances it was also a red-letter day for their 19-year-old Paraguayan left-back, who opened his Champions League scoring account. Signed from Asuncion club Olimpia in the summer of 2016, he spent his first season in Switzerland feeling homesick and putting on a little too much weight, while rarely featuring in the first team. Now starting regularly, he partly attributes this to new coach Raphael Wicky, who speaks good Spanish. Gritty and adventurous, he is full of tricks when pushing forward.

5 Timur ZHAMALETDINOV

CSKA



Along with fellow front-man Fedor Chalov and midfielder Aleksandr Golovin, the 20-year-old symbolises the Moscow club's new wave of attacking talent and demonstrated his worth by coming on as a sub with 20 minutes to go and scoring in the 2-1 win at Benfica. A natural predator, who is stealthy on the break and very mobile, equally at ease working the channels as he is coming deep to link the play. The 3-5-2 system utilised by CSKA coach Viktor Goncharenko has high work-rate and flexibility at its core – and he scores on both counts. Prior to joining CSKA in 2010 he was a long-time academy pupil at Lokomotiv Moscow, before making a name for himself with a glut of goals for CSKA in the UEFA Youth League. Made his Russian Premier League debut in April this year against Krasnodar.

6 Adama DIAKHABY

MONACO

As exciting as he is versatile, the France under-21 striker, a €10m buy from Rennes this summer, does not like being called the successor to Kylian Mbappe – who left Monaco in August for Paris Saint-Germain – but in many senses he is exactly that. Corsica-born, though brought up in Normandy, the 21-year-old left-footer has been used as the point of attack, a second striker and on the left wing. Just 12 months ago he was a fringe figure at Rennes and back in 2014 he had failed to make the grade at Caen. However, he refused to call it quits and was finally rewarded for his persistence when Rennes offered him a place in their amateur squad. He has not looked back since.

UP

HARDLY MOBILE

The Guinean midfielder's career has enjoyed a rapid rise since he first moved to Europe in 2013

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Istres are not exactly one of French football's big names. Only once in their history (2004-05) have they featured in Ligue 1 and due to financial woes they currently wallow in the eighth division of the domestic pyramid. The club has, however, launched the careers of Arsenal striker Olivier Giroud and box-to-box midfielder Naby Keita, the RB Leipzig and Guinea starlet who is due to move to Liverpool next season in a transaction reported to be worth in excess of €65million.

Back in the autumn of 2013, as a hungry 18-year-old in search of his first full-time contract, Keita was finding the French game – traditionally the first port of call for young Africans – a distinctly tough nut to crack. A week-long trial with top-flight Lorient had borne no fruit; and although Ligue 2 Le Mans did sit up and take notice, a huge hole in their accounts meant they could not afford him.

Left out in the cold, Keita might have accepted his fate and beat a retreat to his hometown of Conakry. But, unwilling to let his European dream die, he vowed to carry on knocking on doors and moved in with Le Mans' Guinean midfielder Guy-Michel Landel. What he had no intention of doing was returning to Africa and following his father into the motorbike-repair business.

The reward for his persistence would be just around the corner. Tipped off by a Le Mans contact, Istres director of sport Frederic Arpinon began to dig deeper, picking the brains of the coaching staff at Le Mans and hearing good reports about the teenager turning heads at an African Talent Day, an event organised in Marseille by Guinea international defender Bobo Balde.

Arpinon duly invited the youngster for a run-out and within minutes of the trial starting a job offer was in the pipeline.

Keita's easy technique reminded Arpinon of Barcelona ace Andres Iniesta, a view shared by the entire Istres squad. "Naby turned up to the training ground one morning and straight away we all

realised he was special," recalls former team-mate Fouad Chafik, who won caps for Morocco. "He had terrific technical qualities, he was quick, explosive and could score and make goals."

Keita made his debut in a local derby against Nimes in November 2013 and proved an instant hit, scoring one goal and making another in a 4-2 victory. "The boy is a real prospect," smiled Istres coach Jose Pasqualetti in the post-match press conference. "His ability on the ball is startling."

He had set the bar high and despite operating in a struggling team he seemed to improve with every performance. A dribbling machine on the right or through the middle, he was bold, athletic and apparently immune to nerves. At just 1.72m tall and 64kg soaking wet, he was the team's "Little Caesar".

Istres were eventually relegated that season but he had done all he could. "If he'd arrived here earlier, we might have avoided the drop," sighed Pasqualetti. "It was clear he was a player well above the norm. He was outstanding in his off-the-ball runs and his passing. He made the team tick with his technique. He was an easy lad to deal with, always smiling and never posing any problems."

> "He's an intelligent boy and, to his credit, has made really good career choices" **Former Guinea coach Michel Dussuyer**

He was good for Istres and they were good for him. Pasqualetti's adventurous philosophy very much suited Keita, while veteran club midfielder Jerome Leroy – a much-travelled pro who previously featured for Paris Saint-Germain and Marseille – took him under his wing, endlessly providing encouragement. "Jerome Leroy's words of advice are still relevant for me," declared Keita in an interview last year with French website Foot365. "He shared his experience with me and that was very nice of him.

"He told me I had potential but must work to bring it out. I often think about what he used to tell me."

In the 2014 close season Keita found himself at a crossroads. Third-division football with Istres was no use at all to someone of his class and he was reportedly attracting interest from a string of French elite clubs, including Saint-Etienne, Bordeaux, Lille and Nice. The trouble was they all had misgivings. Some worried that he lacked size, while others did not want to gamble on a recruit with only a few months of senior football under his belt.

While they looked for reasons not to bring him on board, leading Austrian side Red Bull Salzburg concentrated on the bigger picture. He was just their type of player – young, talented, dynamic – and they had been tracking Keita for several months.

In charge of Red Bull's global football operation, former France and Liverpool boss Gerard Houllier was at one of Keita's first

Timeline

NOV 22, 2013
Makes his debut in Ligue 2, for Istres against Nimes, and scores in a 4-2 win.

JUN 30, 2014
Joins Red Bull Salzburg from Istres.

JUL 26, 2014
Makes his league debut for Red Bull Salzburg as a second-half sub in a 5-0 win away against Wiener Neustadt.

SEP 5, 2014
Makes his international debut as Guinea beat Togo 2-1 in an African Nations Cup qualifier.

NOV 27, 2014
Scores as Red Bull Salzburg beat Celtic 3-1 in the Europa League.

Star turn... celebrating a goal against Mainz

Guinea guy...on international duty (second from right)

games for Istres, and after informing Ralf Rangnick – the director of sport for Red Bull Salzburg and sister club RB Leipzig – he was duly signed for €1.5m.

"I immediately had confidence in Ralf," declared Keita. "I was touched by his openness. He put his arms around me. He treated me as if I was his son.

"He knows so much about football. If he says something to me, I absorb it. He's a person to trust. He wouldn't lie to me.

"He once said I was like a koala that you always want to cuddle. The thing is I don't know exactly what a koala is. I'm often frightened of animals because many in Guinea are dangerous."

As a result of Keita's desire to move to Liverpool and RB Leipzig's resistance to sell immediately, his relationship with Rangnick soured. But no one can say it was not a mutually beneficial partnership: the Red Bull organisation having a jewel in their midst for four seasons – two in Salzburg and two in Leipzig – while Keita, with the visionary Rangnick in his corner, had his rough edges smoothed, won the Austrian double twice and played in the Champions League.

Not that Rangnick is the only Red Bull figure to have played a part in Keita's inexorable rise to the top.

Considerable credit also belongs to his coaches at Salzburg: first, Adi Hutter, who switched him from an attacking midfield role to that of engine room controller, then Oscar Garcia, who worked on his tactical appreciation. "He was one of the three best players I've ever coached," says Garcia.

Since moving to RB Leipzig for €15m in 2016 – not so much transfer as in-house promotion – Keita has had Austrian coach Ralph Hasenhuttl dishing out the tactical orders. And for the last 18 months or so the Guinean has made enormous strides in his defensive work and discipline. Rather than overdosing on his favourite solo moves, he is now more collectively attuned. He is better at picking the right moment to break the lines and burst forward.

Hasenhuttl has drummed into him that his top priorities are to aggressively lead the pressing pack and force turnovers, and the 22-year-old is happy to oblige. "Naturally it's good to help the team with a goal," says Keita. "But when I step on to the field I'm concentrating on defending as well as I can, winning back possession and finding the best way to support my team-mates. That's my main mission.

"Creatively I've suffered a little. However, the trainer gives me clear instructions and I like to follow them. We're all in this together as a team and just can't do whatever we want."

The main man in RB's sensational transformation last term from Bundesliga new boys to shock national runners-up, Keita is the individual responsible for their balance. Over the course of 90 minutes he covers every base: the intense harassing and tackling, the slick approach play, the retention of the ball in tight spots, the drive and the goal threat.

"Naby is, for me, the complete player," gushed Rangnick in a conversation with *Bild* last spring. "He has great qualities with or without the ball, a tremendous heart and a super mentality. Take the goal he scored against Darmstadt [a sweet right-foot volley in a 4-0 victory]. He had the technique and presence of mind to take the ball on the full. Not many players would have tried that."

Keita's success is the perfect example of what an organic football education can achieve. Honing his skills in impromptu matches on the streets and beach of Conakry and all the while blissfully unaware that he was laying the foundations for a glittering sporting career, that several years on, he would be the most expensive player in the history of the African game.

"I first came across a very young Naby Keita when he was playing for an amateur club in Conakry called FC Bouba," recalls Guinean sports journalist Kanta Soumah on the website Le 360 Afrique. "He then played for FC N'Go and

Challenge...beaten by Alfredo Morales of Ingolstadt in the German top flight

FEB 22, 2015
Scores his first goal in the Austrian Bundesliga, in a 2-2 draw with SV Ried.

JUN 3, 2015
Wins the Austrian Cup as Salzburg beat Austria Vienna 2-0 after extra-time in the Final.

NOV 12, 2015
Scores his first goal for Guinea, in a 1-0 win away to Namibia in a World Cup qualifier.

MAY 15, 2016
Wins a second successive Austrian league title as Salzburg end their season with a victory over Wolfsberger.

MAY 19, 2016
Is among the scorers as Salzburg beat Admira Wacker Modling 5-0 in the Austrian Cup Final.

Determined... taking on Schalke

FC Athouga. When he played, he seemed to have the ball stuck to his feet. You might have thought he'd come through a soccer school, but the truth is he never set foot in one. He's a pure talent."

Immensely popular in Guinea – where an estimated 11 million people have bought his number eight RB shirt – Keita is more commonly known in his homeland as "Titi Deco" or just "Deco", both nicknames given to him as a youngster by his father Sekou. "Titi" refers to the player's childhood admiration for the former Liverpool, Marseille and Guinea striker Titi Camara, while "Deco" is a tribute to the former Porto, Barcelona and Portugal schemer, a player revered by Keita senior.

> "Naby turned up to the training ground one morning and straight away we all realised he was special"
>
> **Former Istres team-mate and Morocco international Fouad Chafik**

When asked about his ambitions in the game, Keita is disarmingly straightforward and honest, talking about turning out for big European clubs and becoming the best player in Africa. Yet never does he peer into the crystal ball in arrogant mode. To his mind, he is stating rock-solid facts. He knows he is talented and simply backs himself.

What sets him apart is his steely inner drive, his resolve not to let anything stand in his way. Not the French clubs who were unwilling to take a chance on him early in his career. Not his initial difficulties settling in at Salzburg. Not the bout of malaria which sidelined him for a spell last year.

"I always found him to be very focused, keen to learn and extremely hard-working,' says his former Guinea coach Michel Dussuyer. "He's an intelligent boy and to his credit, has made really good career choices."

After dazzling for Salzburg in the 2015-16 season, he could have cashed in with a lucrative move to the Premier League. Instead he chose to sign up to RB Leipzig's maiden Bundesliga voyage.

"I came to Leipzig because they were an exciting club with a lot of potential," he told *Die Welt*.

"I didn't want to join a Champions League side straight away. It was too early. I wanted to prove myself in the Bundesliga, help RB enjoy success, then take the next step and carry on developing.

Conakry, Istres, Salzburg, Leipzig, Liverpool: the itinerary of an upwardly mobile African world-beater. WS

Boss...with Leipzig's Ralph Hasenhuttl

JUN 30, 2016
Joins RB Leipzig from Red Bull Salzburg.

SEP 10, 2017
Scores the only goal of the game on his debut as RB Leipzig beat Borussia Dortmund for their first ever victory in the Bundesliga.

JUN 10, 2017
Scores the winner as Guinea win 3-2 away to Ivory Coast and go top of their African Nations Cup qualification group.

AUG 28, 2017
Leipzig announce a deal has been agreed for him to join Liverpool on July 1, 2018.

OCT 7, 2017
As captain of his country, scores the opening goal but is then sent off in a 4-1 World Cup qualifying loss to Tunisia.

Naby Keita

the numbers game

TRANSFER FEES

€1.5m	€15m	€65m
Istres to Salzburg (2014)	Salzburg to Leipzig (2016)	Leipzig to Liverpool (2018)

GUINEA

28

CAPS

GOALS

5

RED CARDS

He was sent off twice in three games, earlier this season, getting his marching order for RB Leipzig against Borussia Monchengladbach in September and then being dismissed for Guinea against Tunisia in October.

LIVERPOOL'S RECORD SIGNINGS

- £55m Naby Keita (2018)
- £35m Andy Carroll (2011)
- £35m Alex Oxlade Chamberlain (2017)
- £34m Sadio Mane (2016)
- £34m Mohamed Salah (2017)

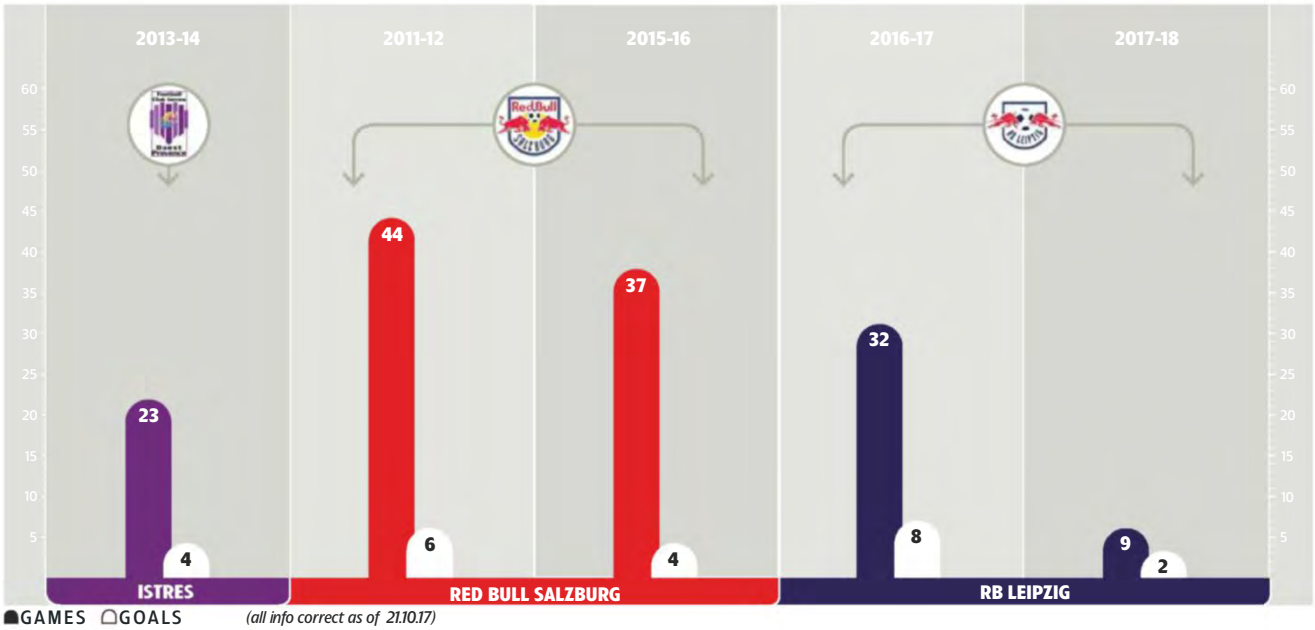
HONOURS

2015	2016	2017
Austrian Bundesliga winner; Austrian Cup winner	Austrian Bundesliga winner; Austrian Cup winner	German Bundesliga runner-up

SIMPLY THE BEST

2015 Guinean player of the Year

2015-16 Austrian Bundesliga player of the year



(all info correct as of 21.10.17)

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

NEW STARS OF SERIE A

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Pietro PELLEGRI

Striker, age 16 (17.03.01), Genoa & Italy

In a sentence
Millennial marvel already making waves in the Italian top flight.

What they say
Genoa coach Ivan Juric: "There's no problem looking after a youngster like him. He's keen to learn and has unbelievable scope for improvement. He can have an important career."

Genoa president Enrico Preziosi, way back in 2015: "The next Messi? We have him here."

Alex Bazzigalupi, his first football coach at Pegliese, a neighbourhood club in the youngster's hometown of Genoa: "Even as a kid he had the physical presence and the character."

> "The next Messi? We have him here"
> Genoa president, Enrico Preziosi

The story so far
The son of Marco Pellegri – who has been on Genoa's payroll for many years and is currently their administrative manager – he was hailed as a footballing prodigy not long after taking up the game and was just 10 years old when inducted into the club's youth system. By his early teens he was training with the first team and in December 2016, aged 15 years and 280 days, he made his senior bow against Torino, matching 1940s Roma legend Amedeo Amadei as Serie A's youngest ever debutant. He scored his first top-flight goal six months later, versus Roma, and at 16 years and 72 days he is the third-youngest marksman in the history of the Italian elite. Scored twice against Lazio this season after coming off the bench and recently received a first call-up to the Italian under-19 squad.

The next step
Internazionale, Milan and Juventus are all reportedly ready to pounce, and Genoa are unlikely to say no to an offer in excess of €30m, but would the youngster want to go? As a Genoa fan, he is living the *Rossoblu* dream at the moment and will not be lured away easily. The obvious marketplace manoeuvre would be to sell him and then loan the teenager back for two or three seasons.

Strengths
Combining agility with composed finishing, he has an excellent first touch and is in his element playing with his back to goal, displaying extraordinary levels of muscular resilience.

Weaknesses
Needs to work a little more on his left foot and could attack the opposition box more.

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT PELLEGRI

- While he and his father are dyed-in-the-wool Genoa supporters, his mother Marzia is a fan of cross-town rivals Sampdoria.
- His footballing idols are former Genoa utility player and skipper Marco Rossi and Zlatan Ibrahimovic.
- Rather than attend school, he spends weekday afternoons with a private tutor.

Antonio BARRECA

Left-back, age 22 (18.03.95), Torino & Italy
Apart from loan spells in Serie B with Cittadella and Cagliari, the attacking full-back has spent over half his life in *Toro* colours, pitching up there at just nine years of age. Although born and bred in Turin, he is a Milan fan.

Mattia CALDARA

Centre-back, age 23 (05.05.94), Atalanta (on loan from Juventus) & Italy
Classy, ball-playing defender who came through the Atalanta youth system and is due to join the defending Serie A champions in the summer.

Sergej MILINKOVIC-SAVIC

Midfielder, age 22 (27.02.95), Lazio & Serbia
Signed from Belgian side Genk for €10m in 2015 and now valued at a whopping €70m. A key member of the Serbia side that won the under-20 world title two years ago.

Stefano SENSI

Midfielder, age 22 (05.08.95), Sassuolo & Italy
Holding midfielder who is blessed with great vision, an impressive range of pass, and double-rations of mobility and self-sacrifice. Came to prominence with Cesena in Serie B and was voted Italy's best young player in 2016.

Fabrizio CALIGARA

Midfielder, age 17 (12.04.00), Juventus & Italy
Known for his drive, grit, cultured left foot and threat from direct free-kicks, he recently made his debut for Juve – in front of a full house at Barcelona's Camp Nou, coming on for the last few minutes of his side's 3-0 loss in the Champions League. Previously featured in the schoolboy ranks of Internazionale and famous old Piedmont club Pro Vercelli.

Piotr ZIELINSKI

Midfielder, age 23 (20.05.94), Napoli & Poland
He has spent his entire professional career in Italy, joining Udinese at the age of 17, then going out on loan to Empoli before joining Napoli for €16m in the summer of 2016. A native of the Polish footballing hotbed of Silesia, his stock-in-trade are his quick feet, devastating forward bursts and an eye for a through ball. He was heavily scouted as a schoolboy and linked with Liverpool, Bayer Leverkusen and Feyenoord.

Patrick CUTRONE

Striker, age 19 (03.01.98), Milan & Italy
This year has been one of vital milestones for the homegrown teen who was promoted to the senior squad in January, appeared in his first Serie A game in May – in a 3-0 home win over Bologna – and has been on the scoresheet in both the domestic top flight and the Europa League. On Milan's books for the last 11 years, he hails from the Como region, a stone's throw from the Swiss border.

Milan SKRINIAR

Centre-back, age 22 (11.02.95), Internazionale & Slovakia
Signed for €23m from Sampdoria this summer and has won over the doubters with his solidity, poise and accurate long-range passing. Played in a deep midfield role when with Slovak club Zilina and was included in the team of the tournament at this year's European Under-21 Championship.

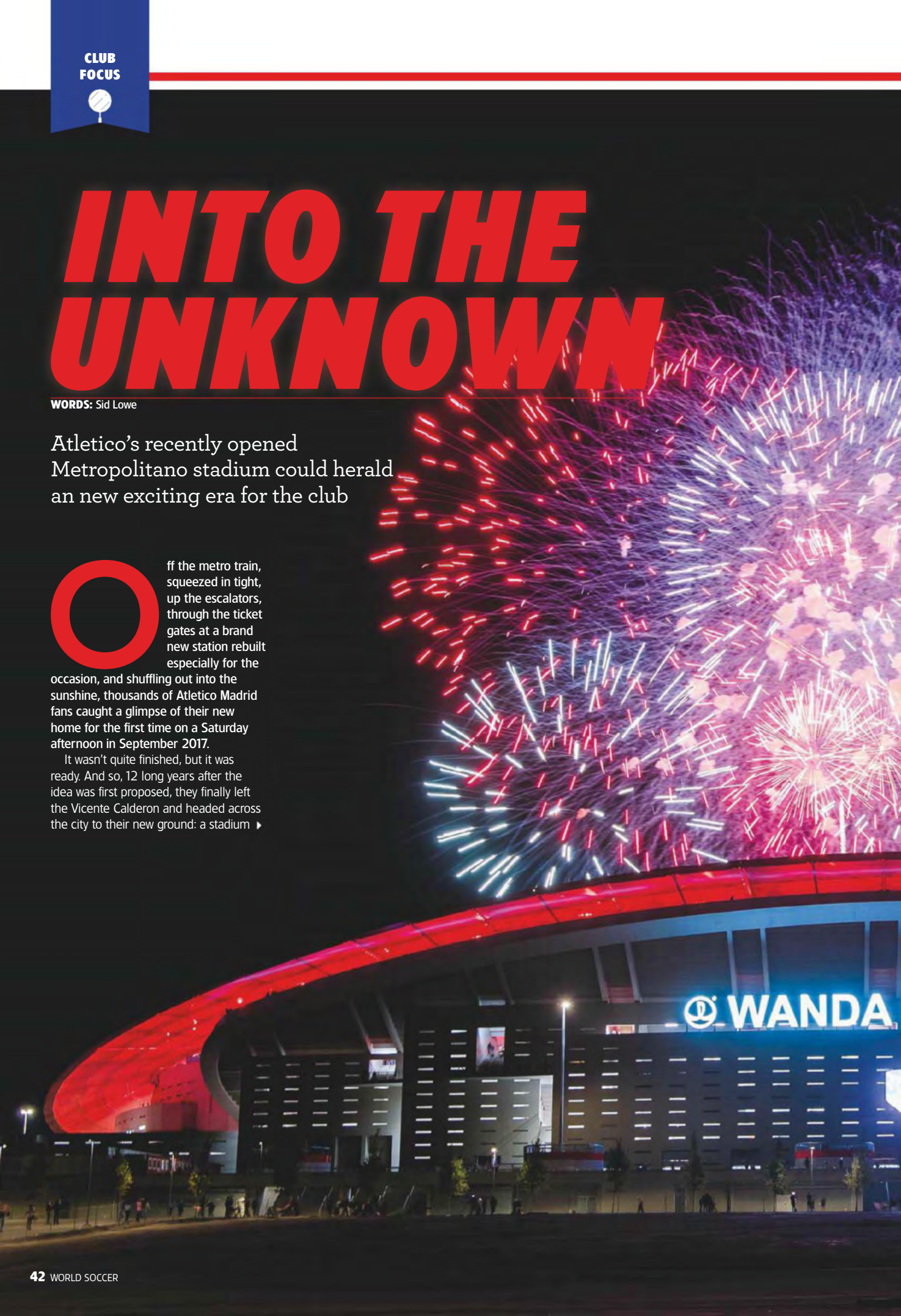
INTO THE UNKNOWN

WORDS: Sid Lowe

Atletico's recently opened Metropolitano stadium could herald an new exciting era for the club

Off the metro train, squeezed in tight, up the escalators, through the ticket gates at a brand new station rebuilt especially for the occasion, and shuffling out into the sunshine, thousands of Atletico Madrid fans caught a glimpse of their new home for the first time on a Saturday afternoon in September 2017.

It wasn't quite finished, but it was ready. And so, 12 long years after the idea was first proposed, they finally left the Vicente Calderon and headed across the city to their new ground: a stadium ▸



METROPOLITANO

called the Wanda Metropolitano. A new ground and a new era too. But what kind of era?

Atletico's president Enrique Cerezo described the Metropolitano, which will host the 2019 Champions League Final, as the best stadium in Europe. The question is whether it would really be their home, whether that new era would be everything they wanted.

Will this be the start of something fantastic, or would it be the end as they lost a grip on what it was that made the club Atletico? The club whose centenary anthem, from rough-voiced folk singer Joaquin Sabina – a track that they didn't even manage to play at the centenary because of an argument over the rights – lauded suffering as much as success; the sense that Atletico were a proper club, that it was all about the fans, proud of their presumed earthiness.

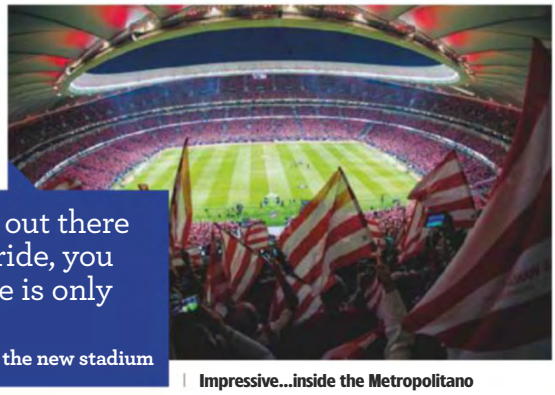
The Calderon was falling apart and smaller than the Metropolitano – with 13,000 seats less – but it had been home, a place of their own, for over 50 years. The road leading to it was called Melancholics Way, which fits somehow, and it was inevitable that some felt that way about leaving.

Beaten...Antoine Griezmann (left) loses out to Chelsea in the Champions League

The surrounding area, 20 kilometres south of the centre and within walking distance from La Latina, down by the river, had become *Rojiblanco* territory. Now here they were, way over the other

"You are Atletico Madrid and there are 50,000 people out there who will die for you. For them, for the shirt, for your pride, you have to go out there and express on the field that there is only one champion and he's in red and white"

Quote from Luis Aragones at the new stadium



Impressive...inside the Metropolitano

New journey...fans arrive by subway

side of the city, stuck out on the north-east in no man's territory, an empty patch of dry ground by the motorway. Small wonder that the excitement of a new home was laced with anxiety.

The potential loss of identity at any new arena and the shift in the sense of "self" is inevitable when a team moves. Atletico knew that and did what they could to create continuity. Portraits of players line the way, while photos of their previous stadiums decorate the metro. Outside the stadium were plaques dedicated to every player to make more than 100 appearances.

The stadium holds onto the club's history, celebrating its past, and is named after the ground they had before the Vicente Calderon, and in the tunnel, before going out to the pitch, painted on the wall are two phrases that sought to sum them up.

There are Diego Simeone's words from the night they celebrated the league title: "It's not just a league title. What these lads transmit to you is something much more important than that: if you believe and you work, you can do it."

And from Luis Aragones: "You are Atletico Madrid and there are 50,000 people out there who will die for you. For them, for the shirt, for your pride, you have to go out there and express on the field that there is only one champion and he's in red and white."

There are 68,000 now. And Atletico

LEAGUE POSITIONS & HONOURS 1929-2017

consider the new stadium to be vital if they are to continue to progress. Those extra 13,000 seats have been sold, with season-ticket requests rocketing.

The cost of the stadium is a long way from what was originally planned when it seemed that they would be able to ride the city's Olympic bid and effectively get the stadium for free. Instead it has cost over €300million (€170m plus the €140m value of the Calderon site) and Atletico were forced into seeking a loan.

But they believe in six or seven years it will be paid for and the revenue generated will see them better equipped to compete with Barcelona and Real Madrid. And here's the bottom line: the stadium is superb, the noise is fantastic and it may yet become a home. It may help them grow. To do that, though, they have to compete in the meantime – and beyond.

Champions League qualification is not just an objective now, it is an obligation. And that brings pressure – and comes at a cost.

In the summer, they were banned from signing new players but spent heavily to secure the continuity of such stars as Koke and Saul. Simeone also extended his contract. That helped to alleviate the fear that had been created when his deal was cut back. Instead of ending in 2020, it was reduced so that it ended in 2018. That created a sense that this was one season, the first in the stadium, and then he will walk away – a sense that was echoed with Antoine Griezmann and Jan Oblak. This felt like a watershed moment; the risk was that it was not the new beginning, but the beginning of the end.

Now, with Simeone renewing, there was a greater sense of security, of future.

They have signed Vitolo, who is due to join them in January when the transfer ban ends, and Diego Costa, who has set to work under fitness coach Profe Ortega. Both were demands made by Simeone to extend his deal.

He also wanted the club to back his attempt to build a new team, to make a transition to a new era in this new arena. The renewal of Saul, 22, and Koke, 25, were part of that. Last season, on the last European night at the Calderon, Simeone had said he wished he could clone Diego Godin and Gabi, but he had come to accept that he could not, so he had to build to the future too.

This season, he has done so. A transition has begun to a new period – even if it is one marked by the return of former striker Costa. Lucas Hernandez and Thomas Partey, in particular, have started getting more minutes. Gabi, the captain, started sitting games out for the first time. "The kids are coming through and they're hungry; they're putting pressure on us, coming up behind, and we know that we can't let up in a single training session," Filipe Luis admitted.

At first, the sensations were positive – and there was still Costa to come, for ▸

Hard work...Filipe Luis (left) and Sime Vrsaljko try to contain Qarabag

> "The kids are coming through and they're hungry; they're putting pressure on us"
>
> **Filipe Luis**

Atmosphere...the fans do their bit

THE POWER CURVE

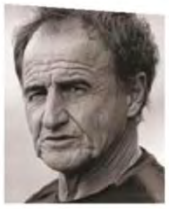
The key figures behind Atletico

DIEGO SIMEONE
Atletico's long-serving coach has been a crucial figure in the club's recent successes. His contract extension, up to 2020, gave the club a huge boost ahead of the opening of the new stadium.

MIGUEL ANGEL GIL MARIN
Long-serving chief executive and majority shareholder. Son of the club's former owner and hugely controversial figure, Jesus Gil.

ENRIQUE CEREZO
Film producer and club president who received a suspended sentence, along with Jesus Gil and Gil Marin, for financial mismanagement in 2003.

ANDREA BERTA
Italian talent-spotter and deal-maker who is responsible for some of Atletico's best transfers of recent times. Now the club's technical director.



OSCAR "PROFE" ORTEGA
Fitness coach who has worked with Simeone at all his clubs. Enforces the coach's philosophy on the training pitch.

WANG JIANLIN
Chinese billionaire and owner of the Wanda Group. Has kept a low profile since buying a 20 per cent stake in the club in 2015.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ATLETICO MADRID

Runners-up...the 1974 European Cup Final against Bayern Munich

● The club was founded by Basque students in 1903 as the Madrid branch of Athletic Bilbao. The source of the club's kit colours has been a matter of debate. A widely reported theory is that a Bilbao student, Juan Elorduy, picked up 50 red and white shirts in Southampton when catching a ship home to Spain. The colours were the same as the City of Bilbao's flag. Both clubs had originally played in blue, and Madrid kept the blue shorts when adopting red and white striped shirts.

● In the late 1930s, after the Spanish Civil War, the club merged with the Spanish air force club, Aviacion Nacional, in order to stay in business. The new club was named Atletico Aviacion de Madrid. They won the Liga title in 1940 and 1941 under legendary former keeper Ricardo Zamora.

● In 1947, under pressure from the Spanish air force, Aviacion was removed from the club's name and the club re-named Club Atletico de Madrid. In 1950 they won the title under coach Helenio Herrera.

● In the early 1960s, the club was forced to use Real Madrid's Estadio Bernabeu after the Metropolitano was sold to developers before the club's new stadium, on the banks of the Manzanares river, could be completed. In 1962, Atletico won their first European trophy, the Cup-winners Cup, beating Fiorentina 3-0 in a replay. But even that success was overshadowed by Real Madrid's sixth European Champions Cup victory.

● In the 1970s, during the presidency of local businessman Vicente Calderon and coached by Luis Aragones, Atletico invested heavily in foreign signings, including the Argentinians Ruben Hugo Ayala, Ramon Heredia and Ruben Diaz. They won the 1973 La Liga title and reached the 1974 Champions Cup Final, losing to Bayern Munich in a replay after Bayern had snatched a last-gasp equaliser in extra-time of the Final in Brussels.

Controversial ...Jesus Gil

● Controversial property developer and politician Jesus Gil won the 1987 presidential election and got through 12 coaches before finally winning the Liga title and Spanish Cup in 1996 under Raddy Antic. Gil spent heavily on high-profile players (Christian Vieri, Juninho) and coaches (Arrigo Sacchi, Claudio Ranieri) but the club were relegated in 1999.

● Promotion was achieved in 2001 under returning coach Luis Aragones, who gave a debut to teenage striker Fernando Torres. Gil, having hired and fired 19 coaches, was forced to resign as president in 2004 amid mounting debts.

● Throughout the next decade, Atletico struggled to compete financially with Real Madrid and Barcelona. They bought and sold big-name strikers – Torres, Diego Forlan, Sergio Aguero, Radamel Falcao – and won the Europa League in 2009.

● The appointment of Diego Simeone in December 2011 led to an upturn in club fortunes. A further Europa League success (2012) was followed by the Liga title in 2014. Atletico reached the Champions League Final in 2014 and 2016, losing to Real Madrid on both occasions, and adding credence to the belief that the club is "cursed".

● In 2015 Chinese billionaire Wang Jianlin, owner of the Wanda property group, bought a 20 per cent stake in the club for €45m.

Double winners ...the 1996 team

now sweating away at the Cerro de Espino training ground – but the enthusiasm of the new is always laced with anxiety and something seemed to slip a little. Again, it felt like it went hand in hand with the stadium; that sense that this could be huge, but would it be right? Could it be the same?

Atletico defeated Malaga and Sevilla at the Metropolitano but lost to Chelsea in their first European game there.

Losing a big Champions League match in the 93rd minute could be seen as classic Atletico, of course, but the manner of the defeat was concerning. Simeone admitted that they were simply not as good as their opponents.

They drew 0-0 at Leganes and were held 0-0 by Qarabag, and although they beat Celta Vigo 1-0 it wasn't the classic Simeone-era show. Instead, they were grateful to keeper Oblak. Chances were few and the coach remains unsure of the best partner for Griezmann, who has not yet reached his best either.

Qarabag's assistant manager put it bluntly, saying: "We knew that they would have difficulties attacking; that they're not fluid when they can't play on the break."

Could it be that the presence of Costa, waiting to take over in January, doesn't help? That the shift towards a new generation has created uncertainty?

Atletico drew 1-1 against Barcelona, and were the first team to take points off them this season, but there were still reasons for concern. Having taken the lead, Atletico played very well for the opening half an hour, but Barca turned the screw in the second half.

This is a time when, far from home, beginning a new era, embarking upon a transition, questions will be asked and solutions sought.

As one newspaper claimed: "Atletico don't recognise themselves" after they drew four of their first nine games. Worse still, that draw against Qarabag leaves them on edge in Europe. And Atletico need European competition now more than ever before. WS

Debut...before the new stadium's first Champions League game

> This is a time when, far from home, beginning a new era, embarking upon a transition, questions will be asked and solutions sought

THE COACH

Diego SIMEONE (Arg)
Age 47 (28.04.70)
Nickname "*El Cholo*" for his fighting spirit, he was appointed Atletico coach in December 2011 after spells with Racing Club, Estudiantes, River Plate and San Lorenzo and Catania in Italy.

He won 106 caps for Argentina as a combative midfielder, and played in the 1998 World Cup – where he was involved in the sending-off of England's David Beckham.

A key member of Atletico's 1996 Spanish double-winning side, he also played in Spain for Sevilla, and spent time in Italy with Pisa, Internazionale and Lazio.

THE KIT

THE SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS

Miguel Angel MOYA
Age 33 (02.04.84)
Previously with Valencia and Getafe, injuries have restricted his role as deputy to Oblak.

Jan OBLAK (Sln)
Age 24 (07.01.93)
One of the world's top keepers, despite a poor start when signed from Benfica in 2014 to replace Thibaut Courtois.

Axel WERNER (Arg)
Age 21 (28.02.96)
Signed in summer 2016 after playing for Argentina at the Rio Olympics. Loaned to Boca Juniors last season.

DEFENDERS

FILIPE LUIS (Bra)
Age 32 (09.08.85)
Brazilian international left-back in his second spell at the club after a disappointing season at Chelsea.

Jose GIMENEZ (Uru)
Age 22 (20.01.95)
Long-time prospect, now an established no-nonsense centre-half. Can also be deployed in central midfield.

Diego GODIN (Uru)
Age 31 (16.02.86)
One of the world's top centre-backs and a key figure for Simeone. Contracted until 2019.

Sergio GONZALEZ
Age 22 (26.05.95)
Home-grown product who was included in the Champions League squad as a reserve left-back.

Lucas HERNANDEZ (Fra)
Age 21 (14.02.96)
Versatile stopper who has come through the ranks. His French father, Jean-Francois, played for Atletico in early 2000s.

JUANFRAN
Age 32 (09.01.85)
Real Madrid youth product and regular right-back since 2011, although injuries have taken their toll of late.

Stefan SAVIC (Mne)
Age 26 (08.01.91)
Centre-back fulfilling his talent after a promising career failed to take off at Man City. Revived his fortunes at Fiorentina.

Sime VRSALJKO (Cro)
Age 25 (10.01.92)
Right-back signed from Sassuolo in 2016, who is starting to challenge Juanfran this season.

MIDFIELDERS

AUGUSTO Fernandez (Arg)
Age 31 (10.04.86)
Combative figure who missed much of last season with a cruciate knee injury. Signed from Celta Vigo.

Yannick Ferreira CARRASCO (Blg)
Age 24 (04.09.93)
Speedy winger, known as YFC, who made his name at Monaco before a move to Atletico in 2015.

GABI
Age 34 (10.07.83)
Club captain and ever-present figure since returning to the club from Zaragoza in 2011.

Nicolas GAITAN (Arg)
Age 29 (23.02.88)
Attacking midfielder who has not quite lived up to the reputation he earned at Benfica and could leave in January.

KOKE
Age 25 (08.01.92)
Accomplished all-rounder who has been at the club since an early age. Has recently agreed a contract until 2024.

Thomas PARTEY (Gha)
Age 24 (13.06.93)
Holding midfielder who is likely to play more as Gabi winds down his career. Has also played at right-back.

SAUL Niguez
Age 22 (21.11.94)
Central midfield star of Spain's 2017 Euro Under-21 side. From a family of footballers.

VITOLO
Age 28 (02.11.89)
Talented midfielder controversially sent on loan to Las Palmas after being signed from Sevilla in the summer.

FORWARDS

Angel CORREA (Arg)
Age 22 (09.03.95)
Talented youngster signed from San Lorenzo in 2014 but yet to hold down a starting place.

Diego COSTA
Age 29 (07.10.88)
Bruising centre-forward who returned this summer, despite being unable to play until January because of the transfer ban.

Kevin GAMEIRO (Fra)
Age 30 (09.05.87)
Clever finisher who has struggled to gain a starting place since moving from Sevilla in 2016. Could move on in January.

Antoine GRIEZMANN (Fra)
Age 26 (21.03.91)
One of the world game's brightest stars. Opted to stay in Madrid this summer despite big-money interest from elsewhere.

Fernando TORRES
Age 33 (20.03.84)
"*El Nino*", having made his debut at 17, is now the club's elder statesman after an inconsistent but trophy-laden career.

Luciano VIETTO (Arg)
Age 23 (05.12.93)
Former Argentina youth international who spent last season on loan at Sevilla and was expected to move on this summer.

(ages as of 03.11.17)

Glenn Moore

Portland show their ugly side

US women's finale won with spoiling tactics

It may have been staged at the home of Walt Disney World but there was little fantasy about the championship match of the National Women's Soccer League. Not that it will have bothered Portland Thorns, who went to Orlando to do a job and achieved a 1-0 win over North Carolina Courage that their coach Mark Parsons called "maybe the most beautiful ugly game I've ever been part of".

Beautiful for the winners, ugly for the viewers. Unprotected by an overly lenient referee in Danielle Chesky, two Courage players were forced off with injuries before half-time. And they subsequently retaliated in kind, making for a staccato game of few chances. Played while the pain of the men's failure to reach the 2018 World Cup finals was still raw, the game demonstrated the best and worst of US soccer, with its great athleticism but a distinct lack of creativity.

The one moment of inspiration came early on, when a 40-yard snap-shot from Sam Mewis hit the bar with Thorns goalkeeper Adrianna Franch stranded. The winning goal was more in keeping with the game, as an unmarked Lindsey Horan lashed in at the back post after a long free-kick had skimmed off heads to reach her.

Parsons denied he sent his players out with instructions to kick Courage out of their stride, citing the tension of the occasion and a fortnight's training without physical contact allowed. This is probably true, but his fellow Englishman, Courage's Paul Riley – who had the bittersweet consolation of being named coach of the year – was unimpressed. "I'm surprised Portland played that way in the first half; it's not that type of team," he said. "I'd rather see the players play than kick people, but they chose the latter."

Courage lost successive right-backs, Taylor Smith, then stand-in Kristen Hamilton. Both were injured in collisions with Tobin Heath, ironically a former garlanded player for the University of North Carolina. Heath who was later injured herself, usually imposes herself on a match through her talent, which perhaps underlines how the pressure of a Final affects players.

For Thorns and their coach, winning is what matters, that is their obligation to employers and fans. The Portland supporters who feted them on their return were happy enough. Victory was sweet having won the shield last season but then losing in the play-off semi-finals (no regular-season winner has gone on to win the championship). However, for a sport still trying to shoulder its way into the public eye such a grim showpiece was disappointing. Only 8,124 were in Orlando to watch it, which is the lowest championship attendance to date, but both the curious and the committed will have tuned in on television. Unfortunately, the curious may not be back.

Tough... Portland Thorns' Tobin Heath (in red) and Makenzy Doniak of North Carolina Courage

This was the fifth season of the NWSL, the third attempt at a professional women's league in the US, and while the competition now appears established it is not without problems, mostly related to money. Women's football still runs at a loss worldwide and for all the national team's success, and the sport's huge grassroots base, the US is not immune to this problem. Although extra games meant total attendance passed 600,000 for the first time, the average of 5,083 was 8.5 per cent down. More positively there were fewer complaints about organisation and the increased TV coverage was welcome.

Earlier in the year there was bullish talk of the league expanding to a dozen clubs, with a Los Angeles franchise to the fore, possibly with the involvement of FC Barcelona. Now there appears to be a shift in focus that involves strengthening the weaker clubs already in the league and raising standards overall before adding new ones.

In most countries a failing club simply slides down the leagues, but in US sports there is usually no relegation. They either fold – which undermined previous efforts to establish a national women's league – are sold or move town.

The latter option, though alien to Europeans, can succeed. North Carolina Courage were Western New York Flash until a mid-winter sale. With coach and squad making the 500-mile move together, the team won the regular season and gates were up 20 per cent on last year's incarnation. It was, said Riley, a rush to get organised but a good move for the team who enjoyed a better training environment.

Kansas City could be next. The club changed hands, but not location, last year, although the switch does not appear to have worked. Kansas were back-to-back NWSL champions in 2014-2015 and featured players such as Heather O'Reilly and Lauren Holiday. The team remain competitive under Vlatko Andonovski, but they missed the play-offs and their average gate of 1,788

Struggling...Kansas City (in white)

Champions... Portland Thorns

was the lowest by any club since 2014.

Ideally, Sporting Kansas City will take over and become the fourth MLS club to have a team in NWSL, after Houston Dynamos (who own Dash), Portland Timbers (Thorns), and Orlando City (Pride). Flash's owners, incidentally, having sold their NWSL franchise, re-started under the same name in the second-tier United Women's Soccer League.

"We need more MLS teams involved, whether through expansion or transition like us," said Riley, whose team is linked with NASL's North Carolina. "The gap between the independent teams, like Sky Blue and Boston, and those with pro men's clubs like Portland and Orlando, is growing, and the independent clubs need to tie in with MLS clubs."

According to Parsons: "NWSL has some worries, but they will fix it. There is a constant push to raise standards and the league has improved a lot in the five years I've been here.

"More organisations like Orlando, who are a big club, and North Carolina Courage, who are well run, will come in and strengthen the league."

In Europe there is already growing consolidation with the men's game. If NWSL is to retain its pre-eminence it must follow suit. WS

Round-up

FA TOP BRASS GRILLED AS MARLEY STEPS UP

Senior Football Association officials endured an embarrassing afternoon's cross-examination by members of a UK Parliamentary Committee investigating their handling of allegations of bullying and racism made by Eniola Aluko against England boss Mark Sampson.

Martin Glenn, the FA chief executive and chairman Greg Clarke faced calls for their resignation, with the former also accused of attempting to "near blackmail" Aluko.

Interim... Mo Marley

An inquiry had decided Sampson did use racially discriminatory language, but cleared him of "a course of bullying" and said he was not "a racist". Sampson, who was fired after the FA decided allegations of inappropriate behaviour towards female players pre-dating his England tenure was conduct unbecoming of the role, is considering suing for wrongful dismissal.

Mo Marley, coach of England under-19s, took temporary control of the senior team following the Welshman's dismissal. Marley steered England to Euro Under-19 success in 2009 working with several of the current senior squad.

NORWAY'S EQUAL PAY DEAL BUT DANES STRIKE

In a landmark agreement Norwegian men and women who represent their country will receive equal pay for doing so after the men's squad offered to sacrifice some of their income to bring the women's up to parity.

However, in Denmark, despite a similar offer from the men's team, the Euro 2017 finalists went on strike over their employment dispute with the federation causing the cancellation of a World Cup 2019 qualifier with Sweden.

Unhappy... Argentina

TROUBLE IN SOUTH AMERICA

Argentina's national team went on strike in protest at the lack of resources provided by the AFA. The players, who are amateurs, said they do not receive enough expenses to cover the cost of attending training, while facilities and travel arrangements were inadequate.

Several leading recent Brazilian internationals, including Cristiane, quit the national team in protest at the firing of Emily Lima, their first female coach, and re-instatement of Valdao, and a lack of pathways for other women into decision-making.

Aussie arrival... Laura Bassett

BASSETT GOES DOWN UNDER

Laura Bassett was the highest profile new arrival as Australia's W-League began. England's World Cup bronze medallist joined Canberra United, having been a free agent since the closure of English club Notts County.

Melbourne City are seeking a hat-trick of titles following their founding by Manchester City's parent company in 2015.

Sorted...Norway (in white) at this year's Euros

ROAD TO RUSSIA

S AMERICA

Messi to the rescue on thrilling final day

South America's qualification campaign is usually a tight affair that comes to a tense conclusion. This time, though, the drama was more intense than ever, with most of the continent clutching a calculator to work out the permutations.

Of the 10 sides, only four went into the last round with nothing to play for: Bolivia and Venezuela, who had never been in contention; Ecuador, who had fallen away after winning their opening four matches; and Brazil, 10 points ahead of the rest of the field and already in Russia.

Going into the final round it was all but mathematically certain that Uruguay would be joining Brazil.

The wheels had threatened to fall off the Uruguayan campaign over the past year, as a team with a cautious gameplan were suddenly leaking lots of goals. However, Federico Valverde promoted from the under-20 ranks and joined by Rodrigo Bentancur the team finished strongly.

In every other campaign this century Uruguay had to settle for the play-off place, but this time they ended up a comfortable second, leaving two automatic places still up for grabs. So, the big story going into the last round of matches was would sixth-place Argentina manage to grab one of them?

Needing a draw at the very least, they travelled to the altitude of Quito and found themselves a goal down to Ecuador after just 42 seconds. It was an illustration of the problems faced by Jorge Sampaoli, their third coach of the campaign. He has a fine track record of producing bold, attacking sides, but with no time on the training ground to bed in the massive changes he was trying to make, which makes his preferred high line of three defenders an extremely vulnerable system.

However, understrength and under a caretaker coach, Ecuador's attempts to take the game to their opponents played into the visitors hands – and provided Lionel Messi with some space in which to work his magic. With Angel Di Maria in a free role that allowed him to float and combine with Messi, they tore the host's defence to shreds.

Through... Uruguay's Luis Suarez

Before the 20-minute mark the pair had carved out plenty of chances and Messi scored twice. However, with the effects of altitude expected to kick in during the second half, and Ecuador introducing star striker Enner Valencia (who was not considered fit enough for the full 90 minutes), an equaliser could have proved fatal for Argentina.

In the end the away side were happy to run down the clock in a scrappy second half that was uneventful – except for a single moment of genius.

When a clearance deflected to Messi in space, his run and feint gave him room

Saviour...Lionel Messi celebrates against Ecuador in Quito

> The pressure on Messi is immense. Without him, Argentina barely exist as a team

to get the ball on his left foot and he beat the goalkeeper with a little chip that was as inspired as it was subtle.

It was an appropriate manner in which to confirm Argentina's place in Russia, and Messi's fourth, and perhaps final, chance of winning the World Cup. Having briefly announced his retirement after last year's Copa Centenario Final, the pressure on Messi is immense. Without him, Argentina barely exist as a team. In the eight games of the campaign that he missed, just seven points were picked up.

It is certainly possible that if Argentina had lost in Ecuador then Messi would not be seen again in an Argentina shirt.

Of the remaining places available, one would go to Paraguay if they could win at home to bottom-of-the-table Venezuela. That task, though, was a little more complicated than it seemed.

Paraguay went into the match with more away wins than home – including an extraordinary 2-1 win in Colombia a few days previously, when, helped by errors from goalkeeper David Ospina, they scored twice in the last five minutes to keep themselves alive. The Paraguayan method of play – deep defence and break quickly – suits itself better to games away from home.

In the event, Venezuela – on a high and delighted with a new defensive solidity – snatched a late winner to break Paraguayan hearts.

Colombia travelled to Peru with both teams still in with a shout. The visitors, still in shock after conceding those two

Clash...Colombia's Frank Fabra (left) vies with Christian Cueva of Peru

late goals to Paraguay, have been a big disappointment since the last World Cup, in which they reached the quarter-finals. Meanwhile Peru, with three wins and two draws in their previous five matches, were in their best form for years, and in with a real chance of making it to a World Cup for the first time since 1982.

Colombia took the lead in Lima through James Rodriguez – and then came one of the key moments of the entire campaign.

Peru centre-forward Paolo Guerrero stepped up to take a free-kick. It was indirect – but once again Ospina blundered. Attempting to make a save, he got a touch on the ball as he was beaten to hand Peru an equaliser. And with the news coming in that Paraguay and Chile were both losing, the result as it stood suited both sides, who meekly played out time.

At the final whistle, Colombia had a place in Russia, while Peru had made sure of being in the play-offs.

And that left Chile with nothing as a 3-0 defeat to Brazil brought the curtain down on the most glorious era in the history of the country's national team. The double Copa America champions will not be going to Russia, and the key members of their golden generation may not be seen in the red shirt again.

The warning signs for this Chile side had been flashing for a while. A team with a gameplan based on constant movement and intensity had aged together – and had been seriously overplayed. Taking the first-team squad to this year's Confederations Cup meant that they had gone without a full break since 2013.

> The result, as it stood, suited both Colombia and Peru, who meekly played out time

Something had to give and the goals dried up, which is fatal for a side that can leave itself open to the counter attack. In their last six competitive matches, Chile had failed to score in five.

There was also a touch of cruel but delicious irony in Chile's elimination.

Last year both they and Peru benefited from facing a Bolivia side who had fielded an ineligible player. Paraguayan-born centre-back Nelson Cabrera had been resident in Bolivia for three years – sufficient to gain citizenship, but not enough for FIFA regulations, which demand a five-year residential period. He came on for the final few minutes of a 2-0 win at home to Peru and a 0-0 draw away to Chile.

With Chile leading the protests, the games were awarded 3-0 to Bolivia's opponents, with the decision ratified in August by CAS. It always seemed harsh. Had Chile and Peru really suffered a wrong so grave that it was worth all those extra points and goals? And there was a real danger that this award of extra points would distort the qualification table, unjustly punishing the teams competing with Chile and Peru.

In the event, there was only one significant distortion. Uruguay, Argentina and Colombia all got enough points to make it to Russia. Paraguay and Ecuador came up short. The big change was that the award of extra points and goals carried Peru above Chile, with the former claiming the play-off spot and the latter eliminated.

Had the Chileans not bothered to protest and contented themselves with points won on the field, their golden generation would still have a chance to say its farewell in Russia.

Tim Vickery

Knocked out...Jorge Valdivia of Chile

GOMEZ LEADS PANAMA INTO DREAMLAND

Historic...Roman Torres (in red) scores Panama's winner

A national holiday was declared in Panama for the day after the country's historic first World Cup qualification, which was achieved by a dramatic 2-1 victory over neighbours Costa Rica.

"It is a victory for all generations of Panamanian football," said forward Blas Perez, who went on to name check players from the country's past. "This victory is for Cascarita Tapia, Roberto Hansell, the brothers Dely Valdes, Percival Piggot, Rommel Fernandez ...all of them have driven us to achieve this historic moment."

Panama, where baseball has long been the national sport, had come close to reaching the World Cup before. Four years ago they lost 3-2 to USA on the final day of qualifying to hand a play-off place to Mexico. But there has been progress under coach Hernan Dario Gomez, the Colombian who steered his own country to the 1998 World Cup and then guided Ecuador to the 2002 finals.

Panama's first World Cup qualification was achieved with a huge dose of luck. Costa Rica had taken a first-half lead through Johan Venegas, forcing Gomez to send on veteran striker Luis Tejada in an early second-half change. Panama forced a corner, and a shot from Gabriel Torres hit a post and was scrambled away, but Guatemalan referee Walter Lopez waived away Costa Rican protests to award the equalising goal to Panama.

The "*gol fantasma*" (ghost goal) would prove hugely significant in the light of USA's loss to Trinidad & Tobago. A winning goal would propel Panama into the automatic places – and so it proved with two minutes remaining, as burly central defender Roman Torres thrashed a shot past keeper Patrick Pemberton.

The celebrations at the Rommel Fernandez stadium continued into the night as coach Gomez became the first person to qualify for the World Cup finals with three different countries.

A controversial figure who resigned from his second spell as Colombia coach in 2011 after accusations that he hit a woman outside a bar in Bogota, Gomez's main concern now is to add firepower to his side. Panama were the second-lowest scorers in the hexagonal, with just two more goals than bottom-placed Trinidad & Tobago. He experimented with several attackers in search for successors to Perez and Tejada, 36 and 35 respectively and with more than 80 goals between them, but to no avail.

Roman Torres, the Seattle Sounders defender and hero against Costa Rica, has been the top scorer of the Gomez era, with five goals, including friendlies. He is one of a handful of players based with MLS clubs. Few of the squad have any experience of playing in Europe, although Gabriel Torres recently moved to Swiss side Lausanne while veteran keeper Jaime Penedo plays for Dinamo Bucharest. Others play in Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico's second tier.

> Gomez became the first person to qualify for the World Cup finals with three different countries

Now next year's World Cup will place them on the global stage. It's been a long time coming.

John Holmesdale

Progress...coach Hernan Dario Gomez

USA CRASH OUT IN TRINIDAD

To say that things went badly wrong for the USA on October 10 would be one of football's greatest understatements. On the final day of World Cup qualifying for the CONCACAF region, the United States were away to Trinidad & Tobago, who were by far the worst side in the six-team group.

T&T's record up until then was just one win in nine games, with five goals scored and 18 given up. The USA needed to win, but even a draw would probably have seen them through. In fact, depending on the results from other games, even a defeat may have sufficed.

Yet the US produced the unthinkable, losing 2-1 in Trinidad while Panama beat Costa Rica 2-1 and Mexico were surprisingly beaten 3-2 by Honduras. Both Panama and Honduras, with 13 points each, jumped ahead of the USA, who were stranded on 12 points. To complete the humiliation, there was the almost mocking arrival of a TV replay that showed the ball never crossed the line for Panama's first goal against Costa Rica.

Panama, along with Mexico and Costa Rica, are off to Russia, while Honduras will play off against Australia. But the USA, after seven consecutive World Cup appearances since 1990, will not be at the finals this summer.

> The youngest player on the team, Christian Pulisic, the scorer of the USA's lone goal, escapes with some credit – but that's all

Almost at once, a blizzard of tweets, twitters and emails took off, most of them expressing dismay and horror. On TV, commentator Taylor Twellman was beside himself, spluttering with indignation as he blamed just about everyone involved in American soccer.

US coach Bruce Arena, to his credit, did not play the blame game. Instead, he admitted responsibility and resigned. He had only been an interim coach anyway, brought in last November when Jurgen Klinsmann was fired.

Arena's job was to clear the mess left by Klinsmann and ensure qualification, but that proved tricky. His result were not much better than Klinsmann's, yet the team looked sure-fire qualifiers prior to the T&T clash when they demolished Panama 4-0. It was a thoroughly professional, merciless performance against a team that had given the USA problems in the past.

Then, just four days later, the wheels came off. The USA, fielding the same line-up that had beaten Panama, looked listless, leaderless and just plain clueless.

Obviously, the players were heavily criticised, but only as a unit – there was not much individual finger-pointing. Maybe there should have been.

Stopped...Paul Arriola of the USA is sent flying by T&T's Levi Garcia

Arena was to certainly blame for persisting with experienced keeper Tim Howard, even though his performances with Colorado Rapids during the regular MLS season had surely shown a slowing down of his reactions. Howard was slow to react on both T&T goals.

But who did play well? Possibly the youngest player on the team, Christian Pulisic, the scorer of the USA's lone goal, escapes with some credit. But that's all.

With the players' performances seeming to defy analysis, with coach Arena having quit, the tweeting search for a culprit moved upward, to the president of the US federation, Sunil Gulati. After all, this had happened on his watch; he was the one who appointed Klinsmann and then took far too long to ditch him.

However, the cries for Gulati's resignation overstepped the bounds

Heartbroken... Christian Pulisic

of common sense by a wide margin. His enforced departure now would be a calamitous case of "dropping the pilot".

Set alongside his achievements, Gulati's faults look like peccadilloes. He has brought modern thinking and professionalism to an essentially amateur set up. His "other job" – as a senior lecturer in economics at Columbia University – has given him a dynamic presence as a public speaker. He has become much respected at the top levels of FIFA, where his reputation as a straight talker meant he was never tainted by the corruption scandal that enveloped that body. Perhaps more importantly, he is a football man through and through, having worked his way up from playing the game as a youth, through all levels of administration in the US game, including a key role in the organisation of the 1994 World Cup.

Under his leadership, the men's

Pressure... Sunil Gulati

national team has gained in credibility and will doubtless quickly recover from the current set back.

Without Gulati's firm backing – to say nothing of the substantial financial aid from his Federation – the National Women's Soccer League would have struggled to survive.

Add to all that a huge expansion of youth soccer, with many more age-level national teams. Not to forget the leadership role that Gulati played in generating the three-country (USA, Canada and Mexico) bid for the 2026 World Cup – which is a bid that seems certain to succeed.

Gulati faces re-election for his fourth and final four-year term next year. It will be Gulati's last election - and it may well be the last "old-style" election that involves only USSF members. The post of president has traditionally been, and still is, an honorary one.

Many feel that, given the massive growth in the importance and the responsibilities of the position, it is time to make it a salaried appointment. Gulati, having elevated the post to the levels of a big-business appointment, and having overseen programmes and events that have made the federation finances stronger than they have ever been, may well be the last unpaid president.

Gulati will be opposed in next year's election, but the qualifications of the candidates who have so far declared themselves - and, indeed, of any further possibles one can think of - hardly suggests a serious threat. But the mysterious perils of the ballot box always lurk.

The votes come from USSF members – both the senior and youth divisions – from a players' council and from the professional leagues, meaning, effectively, MLS. It is greatly to be hoped that maturity and not tweeterish vindictiveness will decide the issue.

Paul Gardner

MISSING IN 2018

Other 2014 finalists not in Russia

HOLLAND ▼
Struggled behind France and Sweden despite replacing Danny Blind with veteran Dick Advocaat.

CHILE
The end of an era for a golden generation of Chilean footballers.

ECUADOR
The early leaders in South American qualifying lost ground and sacked coach Gustavo Quinteros.

CAMEROON
The African champions lost out to Nigeria in their qualifying group.

GHANA ▼
After three successive qualifications, the Black Stars complained about poor refereeing decisions but lost out to Egypt.

ALGERIA
After reaching the knockout stages in Brazil, the north Africans were drawn in a tough group with Nigeria, Cameroon and Zambia.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA ▼
In a group containing Belgium and Greece, Edin Dzeko and co could not repeat their heroics of 2014.

SYRIA'S ADVENTURE ENDS IN HEARTACHE

In the end, Syria's World Cup dream ended in heartbreak, after they came within an inch – literally – of qualifying for their first-ever World Cup finals.

When Omar Al Somah's 120th-minute free-kick struck a post with Australia goalkeeper Mat Ryan beaten, their remarkable qualifying campaign was over.

Coach Fajr Ibrahim's collection of civil-war exiles played 20 games in a marathon campaign, with every one of those played outside of their homeland as the unrest that has ravaged the country continues to claim thousands of lives and displace millions more.

Al Somah had been the hero of the final group game, scoring a 93rd-minute equaliser against Iran to ensure that Syria finished third in the group, behind South Korea and runaway leaders Iran, to reach an unlikely play-off with Australia, which was played over two legs, in Malaysia and Sydney.

Television pictures portrayed wild celebrations back home, where the government had erected giant TV screens in public squares.

Syria's extraordinary triumph in the face of adversity had followed success at youth level when they qualified for the 2015 under-17 World Championship in Chile. But while their achievements were highlighted around the world, the story was far more complex.

The Bashar Al Assad regime has been keen for the national team's exploits to be portrayed as an against-all-odds triumph that has united a divided nation. But all is not what it seems.

Dozens of national-team players have gone missing during six years of a brutal civil war. Jihad Qassab, the former captain of the national team, was reportedly tortured to death in 2016.

The recent positive results coincided with the return of Al Somah and Firas Al Khatib to the squad. Al Somah, who is based in Saudi Arabia with Al Ahli, was back in the side after five years of self-imposed exile, and Al Khatib, who is arguably Syria's greatest player, had excused themselves from national-team duty to express sympathy with the rebel forces fighting Assad's regime.

> While Syria's achievements were highlighted around the world, the story was far more complex

Al Khatib, who now plays his club football in Kuwait for Al Salmiya after a spell in China, had accepted a recall in March for games against Uzbekistan and South Korea, having previously boycotted the squad in protest at Assad's bombing of his hometown of Homs.

Dejected...Syria's Fahad Youssef

The players who have been selected are those who have stayed loyal to the Assad regime, or who have kept quiet about their political allegiances. The civil war forced Al Khatib into an impossible conflict between sporting loyalty and political beliefs. "Whatever happen, 12 million Syrians will love me," he told ESPN earlier this year. "Other 12 million will want to kill me."

The return of Al Somah and Al Khatib to the side meant sporting interests were returned to the fore. Ironically, the team reached the play-offs after a draw with Iran, a country whose government has been a close political ally to Assad and provided military support.

Following the heroic loss to Australia, football and the national team now face an uncertain future in a country still ravaged by civil war.

John Holmesdale

Expectant...fans in Damascus watch Syria v Australia on giant TV screens

AUSTRALIA STUMBLE INTO PLAY-OFFS

World Cup play-offs bring back lots of unhappy memories for football fans in Australia. Every four years the storyline used to be the same: high expectations, nerve-wracking tension, gallant failure.

The nadir was Iran in 1997, when the Socceroos let slip a two-goal lead in the second leg to crash out on away goals. But the curse was finally broken in 2005, when Uruguay were beaten on penalties in Sydney. Since then, qualification has become regular and routine through the AFC after the continental switch from Oceania in 2006. Until now.

A seemingly smooth ride through the final round was derailed by too many draws, a controversial switch in tactics by coach Ange Postecoglou and, ultimately, a mystifying night against Thailand, when the team racked up 41 shots on goal but could only score twice.

Saudi Arabia went through on goal difference instead, and Australia were consigned to reacquainting themselves with the play-offs.

Postecoglou has born the brunt of the frustration. His mid-campaign switch to a back three was rooted in sound logic, but he struggled to find the right personnel in the wing-back positions. With the new system taking time to bed down, the team were left vulnerable defensively.

At the other end, converting chances remains problematic, with the evergreen Tim Cahill getting them out of a hole against Syria in the Asian play-off, scoring twice with trademark headers in the second leg. Even then, had a late free-kick from Omar Al Soma gone in, instead of hitting a post, it would have been Syria preparing to face Honduras.

Postecoglou was due to leave the job post-Russia, but a report that appeared in Melbourne's *Herald Sun* claims he will leave after the play-off games with Honduras in November.

Perhaps tellingly, neither Postecoglou nor his employers (FFA) have denied the story and the rumour is that he will take over at Shanghai Shenhua in time for the next Chinese Super League season.

Header...Tim Cahill scores against Syria

Off to Honduras... Tim Cahill leads the celebrations

It's been a dramatic fall from grace for a coach who was the nation's darling after delivering the Asian Cup on home soil in 2015. With that success still relatively fresh in the mind, fans appear split down the middle as to whether he should stay or go, but many believe he should make his decision known before the series with Honduras.

Los Catrachos are expected to play a counter-attacking game, which is the sort of style that has given Australia plenty of trouble in the past, and the Socceroos will be without regular selections Mark Milligan and Mat Leckie, both of whom will miss the first leg through suspension.

Perhaps that is why FFA has opted against holding a pre-match training camp in the USA. The Australians want to acclimatise as quickly as possible to unfamiliar conditions, although there may also be some simple logistics at play in their decision. Australia played one of their group qualifiers in Iran – where opponents, Iraq, chose to play their home games – and traveling to the US with a host of player passports containing Iranian visa stamps is a further complication FFA can do without.

> The rumour is that Ange Postecoglou will take over at Shanghai Shenhua in time for the next Chinese Super League season

Decision...coach Ange Postecoglou

Fans who went to Tehran are having similar issues as their travel to Central America would normally be via the US route. The new restrictions means more paperwork and an interview process at US Consulates in Australia.

Still, if Australia make it to a fourth consecutive World Cup they will have earned it, after completing 22 qualifiers – the most of any team in history.

Ominously, the coach of Honduras is Jose Luis Pinto, who led Costa Rica for Postecoglou's first game in charge, in 2013, which Australia won 1-0.

If Pinto gets his revenge in November, the decision on whether Australia's coach stays or goes to China will probably no longer be his to make.

Simon Hill

EUROPE

Iceland make history

Eight years ago, Iceland finished bottom of their qualifying group for the 2010 World Cup, winning just once, at home to Macedonia.

Fast forward to 2017 and the country's extraordinary progress in the international game was confirmed when a win over Kosovo in Reykjavik sealed a first World Cup appearance.

Between now and next summer, several numbers will be presented to demonstrate the incredible nature of Iceland's qualification. With a population of 334,000 they are the smallest nation to reach the finals. Some 10 per cent of the population were reported to have travelled to support the team at the Euros in France last year, while one in every 7,000 Icelandic men will travel to Russia next summer...as a member of the Iceland squad.

The only Nordic country to secure automatic qualification, they are coached by Heimir Hallgrimsson – a part-time dentist who took sole charge after Lars Lagerback stepped aside following the team's remarkable progress to the quarter-finals at Euro 2016.

Their place in Russia was clinched with a 2-0 home win over Kosovo, thanks to goals from Gylfi Sigurdsson and Johann Berg Gudmundsson. However, the most significant result came in the penultimate qualifier: a 3-0 win in Turkey which ended the hosts' hopes of reaching the finals and put Iceland in pole position in a tough group, ahead of Croatia and Ukraine. A month earlier, Sigurdsson had been the hero with both goals in a 2-0 victory over Ukraine.

Not surprisingly, Hallgrimsson has stuck with the players who performed so admirably in France last summer, along with similar tactics: a tight defence with heavy emphasis on organisation and speedy counter-attacks. They scored just 16 goals in the campaign – the lowest of any automatic European qualifier.

Hordur Magnusson, who scored the only goal against Croatia in June, has come in for Ari Skulason at left-back, but otherwise the starting XI is the same as the side that humiliated England in Nice.

Only a handful of the team have moved on in club terms since the Euros, with Gudmundsson's move from Charlton Athletic to Burnley making him one of only a few Icelanders playing in one of Europe's top leagues.

The English Championship remains the biggest employer of Iceland's squad. As well as Magnusson at Bristol City, there is Aron Gunnarsson with Cardiff City, Birkir Bjarnason at Aston Villa, Ragnar Sigurdsson for Fulham and Jon Dadi Bodvarsson with Reading.

The first European team to secure their passage to Russia were Belgium, who finished unbeaten under new coach Roberto Martinez and only dropped points in the home draw against Greece.

A switch to a back three helped the Belgians avoid the problem faced by Martinez's predecessor Marc Wilmots – namely that of playing centre-backs Jan Vertonghen and Toby Alderweireld as full-backs.

Romelu Lukaku was Belgium's top scorer with 11 goals, and he scored the winner in a 2-1 win over Greece in Pireus in September that confirmed automatic qualification. But the goals were spread around the squad: wing-back Thomas Meunier scored a hat-trick in the 9-0 thrashing of Gibraltar, while Dries Mertens added five and Eden Hazard, despite injuries, scored six.

Martinez's side finished as the joint top scorers in the European section, alongside Germany, on 43 goals. Their penultimate game was a topsy-turvy affair against Bosnia, in which they came back from 1-0 down to win 4-3.

Martinez blooded some promising youngsters, with Youri Tielemans and Thorgan Hazard, the younger brother of Eden, featuring in the final qualifier against Cyprus. Leander Dendoncker was a sub against Bosnia, while Michi Batshuayi scored against Bosnia.

France confirmed their qualification with a laboured win over Belarus in their final match. Didier Deschamps' side managed just 18 goals in the 10 games, despite the emergence of new talents Kylian Mbappe and Ousmane Dembele.

They did just enough in a 1-0 win over Bulgaria but had been held to a goalless draw by Luxembourg in September, which could have proved costly until nearest challengers Sweden lost 3-2 to Bulgaria to keep *Les Bleus* top of the group.

Spain's qualification was never in doubt after September's 3-0 win over Italy

Scorer...Johann Berg Gudmundsson (far right) against Kosovo

> Iceland coach Heimir Hallgrimsson has stuck with the players who performed so admirably in France last summer

First to qualify... Belgium celebrate

Goal... Republic of Ireland's James McClean

Acrobatic...Spain's Iago Aspas in action against Israel

in Madrid. Italy's need for three points prompted coach Gian Piero Ventura to field an expansive formation which played into the hands of Spain – and in particular midfielder Isco, who scored two spectacular goals.

Spain's 1-0 win in Israel in their final qualifier extended Julen Lopetegui's unbeaten run to 14 games. The former youth coach has revitalised the team's passing game and provided more intensity in the post-Xavi era.

To the spine of David De Gea, Sergio Ramos, Gerard Pique, Sergio Busquets and David Silva, Lopetegui has added new blood in the form of former under-21 stars Isco and Saul Niguez. Right-back Alvaro Odriozola was the latest debutant to impress, while the goals have been spread around – the scorer against Israel, Asier Illaramendi, became their 14th different scorer in 14 games.

Another of the favourites for next summer's finals, Germany were the only European team to finish with a 100 per cent record, with 10 wins out of 10.

They concluded their campaign with a 5-0 victory against Azerbaijan, a performance that included two goals from emerging star Leon Goretzka. Sandro Wagner, who was recalled after a number of years on the sidelines, scored his fifth goal in his first five games, the first German player to do that since Ronnie Worm in 1978.

Poland secured qualification with a 6-1 win in Armenia, following up a few days later with a 4-2 victory over Montenegro. Striker Robert Lewandowski was on target in both games, taking his total for the campaign to 16 and finishing as the top scorer in the European section.

England were unbeaten in their 10 matches, but scored only 18 goals in total. Harry Kane, Gareth Southgate's new captain, scored the only goals in underwhelming 1-0 wins over Slovenia and Lithuania in their final games.

Portugal's fate was always expected to come down to their final qualifier at home to Switzerland, the 2-0 winners of the reverse fixture in Berne in September 2016. And so it proved, with Portugal too strong for their rivals, running out 2-0 winners in Lisbon.

An own goal by Johan Djourou set the Portuguese on their way when he put the ball into his own net four minutes before half-time and Andre Silva sealed the victory in the 57th minute as Portugal pulled level on 27 points with Switzerland but topped Group B on goal difference.

Serbia lost their penultimate game 3-2 to already eliminated Austria thanks to an 89th-minute winner in Vienna. It was their first defeat of the campaign, but they confirmed top spot in the group with a 1-0 victory over Georgia in Belgrade three days later.

The runners-up spot in Serbia's group was hotly contested, with Wales meeting Republic of Ireland in Cardiff, in a winner-takes-all decider for a runners-up spot and a play-off place.

Crunch...Portugal's Bernardo Silva takes on Switzerland

PLAY-OFF DATES

NOVEMBER 9
Northern Ireland v Switzerland
Croatia v Greece

NOVEMBER 10
Sweden v Italy

NOVEMBER 11
Denmark v Republic of Ireland

NOVEMBER 12
Switzerland v Northern Ireland
Greece v Croatia

NOVEMBER 13
Italy v Sweden

NOVEMBER 14
Republic of Ireland v Denmark

Wales were without the injured Gareth Bale and lost midfielder Joe Allen to Ireland's overly physical approach in the 37th minute. Ireland's smash-and-grab mission was completed in the 57th minute when James McClean volleyed home a cross from Jeff Hendrick, who had seized on an indecisive kick from keeper Wayne Hennessey to defender Ashley Williams.

Holland, needing to beat Sweden by seven goals in their final qualifier to pip the Swedes for the runners-up spot behind France, missed out. Arjen Robben scored both goals in his last international but the 2-0 scoreline was in vain.

Denmark, after a poor start in which they lost two of their opening three games, recovered to finish strongly behind Poland. Age Hareide's side confirmed their play-off place with a 1-0 win in Montenergo, courtesy of a spectacular strike from Cristian Eriksen, and a 1-1 draw at home to Romania, while Montenegro lost their final game 4-2 to Poland.

Croatia's federation sacked coach Ante Cacic after a disappointing 1-1 draw with Finland left them needing to win their final match, away to Ukraine, to clinch a play-off place. Under interim boss Zlatko Dalic, the Croatians rallied to win 2-0 in Kiev with both goals scored by Andrej Kramaric.

Slovakia, runners-up in England's group, missed out on the play-offs as the team with the worst record of the nine second-placed sides. They beat Malta 3-0 in their final match, but a 1-0 loss to Scotland three days earlier proved decisive. Scotland had hoped to take second place in the group, but could only draw 2-2 with Slovenia in their last game despite a spirited performance.

John Holmesdale

AFRICA

Egypt return to the top table

It has been the proverbial quest for the Holy Grail, as for decades Egypt failed to turn their dominance of the African game into World Cup qualification. However, a last-gasp penalty and a horror refereeing decision meant The Pharaohs will be at next summer's finals after an absence of 28 years.

That Egypt have had to wait so long to return to the World Cup is all the more surprising when it is taken into account that they won three African Nations Cup titles in succession, from 2006 to 2010, and Al Ahly have been one of the African game's most successful club sides.

Egypt were the second country from Africa to reach Russia, booking their spot a day after Nigeria, who in June looked to be in a real crisis of confidence but then four months later romped through a qualifying group that was considered to be the toughest of the five in the continent's preliminaries.

Egypt were last at the World Cup in 1990 and since then they have suffered the agony of several close misses, including a rare play-off game when they finished level with Algeria in 2010. Over the years they have employed a myriad of different coaches in an attempt to reach the promised land – including Ruud Krol, ex-Italy international Marco Tardelli and the American Bob Bradley – but it was the taciturn Hector Cuper who finally got them over the line. His wages represent "the best $70,000 a month I've ever spent" according to Egyptian Football Association president Hany Abo Rida.

> Egypt were last at the World Cup in 1990 and since then they have suffered the agony of several close misses

Egypt were also gifted a large slice of luck in the end as well, converting a last-minute penalty to win at home against bottom-placed Congo in a nerve-filled performance in Alexandria after Ghana had earlier been effectively eliminated when a legitimate-looking last-minute winner away in Uganda – which could have added pressure onto the Egyptians – was inexplicably ruled offside. The South African referee Daniel Bennett has since been sidelined by the Confederation of African Football.

Mohamed Salah stuck away the 95th-minute spot-kick to illicit a massive collective gasp of relief from all around Egypt – and then set off the sort of street parties not seen in years as the country suffers under the return of repressive military rule following the heady days of the Arab Spring.

And while it was not the most convincing of qualifying campaigns, the key result came last November when they beat Ghana at home.

Egypt then lost in Uganda but won the return game by a single goal, and as Ghana continued to drop unnecessary points and Uganda ran out of steam, they were able to clinch qualification with a match to spare, rendering the final group game in Ghana of academic interest only.

Which is probably just as well because at the end of the African qualifiers for the last World Cup, Ghana had hammered Egypt 6-1 in the play-offs to book their berth for Brazil

Liverpool's Salah is very much the talisman of this Egypt side, which has more foreign-based players in the squad than at any other time previously in the country's football history. Overseas

Return...Nigeria's Victor Moses takes on Cameroon

Talisman...Egypt's Mohamed Salah takes a tumble

players include Ahmed Elmohamady of Aston Villa, Mohamed Elneny of Arsenal, Ahmed Hegazy of West Bromwich Albion and the promising Ramadan Sobhi of Stoke City. There is also a place on the fringes for Sam Morsy of Wigan Athletic. Born in Wolverhampton to an Egyptian father, Morsy has won two caps and was on the bench for October's World Cup victory over Congo.

The 44-year-old Essam Al Hadary, who is now playing his club football in Saudi Arabia, remains Egypt's first-choice goalkeeper, and were he to play in Russia next June he would beat Faryd Mondragon's record as the oldest competitor at the tournament by almost two-and-a-half years.

Nigeria had begun their World Cup group qualifying campaign with successive wins and looked on as rivals Algeria and Cameroon stumbled at the opening hurdles.

However, defeat at home to South Africa in an African Nations Cup qualifier in June suggested that the Super Eagles were too young, inexperienced and vulnerable, which left coach Gernot Rohr under a heap of pressure.

Relief...Nigeria boss Gernot Rohr was under pressure

Cameroon had won the African Nations Cup in between the second and third rounds of World Cup qualification and were expected to give Nigeria another torrid afternoon in Uyo when the race to Russia resumed in September.

Instead, Victor Moses and John Obi Mikel made a triumphant return to the side and led Nigeria to a 4-0 battering of the Indomitable Lions, which all but sealed the outcome of the group.

With Algeria continuing to flounder and Cameroon being mathematically eliminated, only Zambia could stop the Nigerians, but they would need to win in the penultimate round in Uyo – which is seemingly now entrenched as the new headquarters of the Nigerian team.

Alex Iwobi's goal 20 minutes from time put pay to any hopes of a surprise Zambian away win and ensured the Super Eagles go to a third successive World Cup, hoping to do better than their second-round placing in Brazil in 2014.

The three remaining African slots will all be decided in November's last round of qualifiers.

Ivory Coast must win at home otherwise opponents Morocco will go through from Group C, while Senegal effectively need a point from two games remaining against South Africa to finish top of Group D. In Group A, Tunisia are as good as through, requiring only a home draw with neighbours Libya to return for a fifth World Cup finals appearance but their first since Germany 2006.

Mark Gleeson

Not quite...Tunisian celebrations are on hold

World Soccer vintage 49 years ago

November 1968

Invasion of Czechoslovakia causes mayhem

The cover of *World Soccer*'s November 1968 issue featured stand-in Chelsea captain Eddie McCreadie leading his side out for a league game.

Inside, Roger MacDonald reported on how European football had been affected by the Eastern bloc invasion of Czechoslovakia.

"Panic spreads like the plague, and it was fear and stupidity that stirred the European Football Union to turn its international competitions upside down, just as it was fear and stupidity that sent Russian tanks rumbling into the streets of Prague," he wrote.

A UEFA emergency committee met to re-draw the first round of the European Cup and European Cup-winners Cup, with all the Eastern European clubs pitted against one another. However, the Eastern Europeans then pulled out, so the first and second rounds were packed with a number of byes.

"What was so extraordinary is that the football associations of Europe were never consulted in the curious sequence of events that led up to the convulsion of the draw," continued MacDonald. "UEFA took the step almost entirely on the basis of protests by Celtic and Milan, whose support seemed to be limited to Sweden and Luxembourg."

Meanwhile, Leeds United and Hungary's Ferencvaros still went ahead with their long-delayed Inter-Cities Fairs Cup Final.

"Leeds United proceeded as planned to play out an exhilarating Fairs Cup Final, in which the absence of goals was more than compensated by Ferencvaros' technical brilliance and the stunning expertise of the defence that frustrated them," suggested MacDonald. "But the effect of this match, which could only foster goodwill, was lost on UEFA.

"Forced – by the expressions of indignation at the new draw that flowed in from both sides of the Iron Curtain – to hold an emergency committee meeting, they nevertheless kept to the new draw, separating the political entities. Piously they expressed the hope that the atmosphere would have cooled before the second round took place. But it was already apparent that for the East there would be no second round, and one by one they withdrew.

"Sandor Barcs, a vice-president of UEFA, had no hesitation in condemning the decision of UEFA's emergency committee.

"'It merely strengthens the opinion that the European Cup is basically a competition for commercial interests,' he told me in Budapest. 'The financial dividends have become more important than the football.

"'It would seem that UEFA took their decision because they were afraid that Milan and Celtic would withdraw from the European Cup altogether, thereby drastically reducing its revenue, and ultimately that part of the profits taken by UEFA.'"

Celtic and Milan would meet in the quarter-finals, with the Italians going on to beat Ajax in the Final. WS

Panic...there was uncertainty in Europe

EIGHT

WORLD SOCCER, November, 1968

World Diary Dateline ..... MARSEILLE — BUDAPEST

ROGER MACDONALD

PANIC spreads like the plague, and it was fear and stupidity that stirred the European Football Union to turn its international competitions upside down, just as it was fear and stupidity that sent Russian tanks rumbling into the streets of Prague. Now the actions have become indivisible, and as the barbed wire is rolled out again between East and West, so two football camps appear also—a schism that is little short of a disaster.

When the news of the invasion came through from Czechoslovakia, I was beside myself with indignation, and my immediate reaction was that not one ball should be kicked between the invaders and the rest. I welcomed the telegram sent to UEFA by Celtic's chairman, Bob Kelly, demanding that there should be no contact on the football field, because events in Czechoslovakia were too serious to divorce sport from politics.

I maintained this view in a discussion on French radio, which followed the decision of UEFA's emergency committee—Messrs. Bangerter, Crahay, Praver, Franchi and Wiederkehr—to re-draw the first round of the European Cup and the European Cup Winners Cup. "The Russians are no better than gangsters," I said indignantly. "Very well," said Robert Vergne, "but are the footballers of Ferencvaros gangsters also? And are they gangsters when they play Celtic but not when they play Leeds United?"

There was, of course, no answer. If sport becomes a political weapon, irrespective of whether the wielders of the sword seem to have a just cause, it becomes soiled with the amorality, the pragmatism, the total materialism of politics itself. Such is the devious adaptability of politicians that even the highest moral argument can be turned inside out. If West shuns East over Czechoslovakia today, what is to stop Russia shunning the United States over Vietnam tomorrow, or Black Africa boycotting Britain over Rhodesia? The list of scandals is so long, that if sport becomes embroiled the effective result would be cultural suicide.

In any case, to abstain deliberately from contact is to play the Russians at their own game. It was the fear of the spread of ideas, the creation of an alternative to a rigid doctrine, that spurred the Soviet Union into invading Czechoslovakia. Removing contact at one of its most effective levels, on the sports field, merely strengthens the barrier. If respectability were of importance to Russia, then culture might more plausibly be used as a field for the front line. But it is not, and a token victory of principle is also a defeat in the battle for men's minds.

Leeds United had no hesitation in playing Ferencvaros in the long-delayed final of the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup. They said flatly that "there was, or should be, no contact between sport and politics" and that they were "going ahead come what may". Denis Follows, Secretary of the English FA, pointed out that "associations had to be bound by the rules of the international federation, and that once political considerations were allowed to creep into the organisation of international competitions, the result would be chaos".

What was so extraordinary is that the football associations of Europe were never consulted in the curious sequence of events that led up to the convulsion of the draw. UEFA took the step almost entirely on the basis of protests by Celtic and AC Milan, whose support, in practical terms, seemed to be limited to Sweden and Luxembourg.

While Celtic had a right to a decision of conscience, surely they did not have the right to impose a moral attitude on the remaining competitors. If they wished to make a protest, they should have withdrawn unequivocably, not passed the buck firmly to UEFA.

Some of the reported statements from Celtic were, to say the least, confusing. Mr. Kelly said that "matches in eastern Europe would be difficult and dangerous"—as dangerous as the matches against Racing in South America, I wondered? Here, surely, had been a case for withdrawal on principle, if ever I saw one. Jock Stein, Celtic's manager, said he "would be happy to meet Ferencvaros at a later date". How much later? A month, or a year, one round or two? Principles that have time-limits are strange principles indeed. All Celtic did was to lay themselves open to the suspicion that it was the strength, not the political lineage, of Ferencvaros that really disturbed them. If this was so, then the substitute tie with St. Etienne merely took them out of the frying pan and into the fire.

So Celtic cancelled their trip to Budapest, cancelled their hotel bookings and sent a curt note to their disappointed hosts. Leeds United proceeded as planned, to play out an exhilarating Fairs Cup final, in which the absence of goals was more than compensated by Ferencvaros's technical brilliance and the stunning expertise of the defence that frustrated them.

But the effect of this match, which could only foster goodwill, was lost on UEFA. Forced, by the expressions of indignation at the new draw that flowed in from both sides of the Iron Curtain, to hold an emergency committee meeting, they nevertheless kept to the new draw separating the political entities. Piously they expressed the hope that the atmosphere would have cooled before the second round took place. But it was already apparent that for the indignant East there would be no second round, and one by one they withdrew.

The Fairs Cup, by a ludicrous inconsistency, refused to follow UEFA's lead, and this competition has gone ahead with the withdrawal of just two teams, one Danish, one Luxemburger. Aberdeen, significantly, paid only lip service to Celtic's lead.

Sandor Barcs, a vice-president of UEFA, had no hesitation in condemning the decision of UEFA's emergency committee. "It merely strengthens the opinion that the European Cup is basically a competition for commercial interests," he told me in Budapest. "The financial dividends have become more important than the football itself. It would seem that UEFA took their decision because they were afraid that Milan and Celtic would withdraw from the European Cup altogether, thereby drastically reducing its revenue, and ultimately that part of the profits taken by UEFA.

"It took several years for UEFA to abandon a politico-geographical draw in which eastern and western teams were kept apart for as long as possible, mainly because the West felt such games were not financially rewarding. The final has still not been played in Eastern Europe after 13 competitions, because UEFA is primarily concerned with making sure that the receipts are in hard, negotiable currency.

"This would suggest that the European Cup and the Cup Winners Cup are primarily western competitions, in which eastern clubs are permitted only on sufferance. I cannot imagine that a protest by,

Panic endangers soccer future

A moment out of Raymond Kopa's past—one of his many triumphs for Reims. Kopa is pictured after scoring a European Cup goal against Austria Vienna.

> **"Panic spreads like the plague, and it was fear and stupidity that stirred the European Football Union to turn its international competitions upside down"**

say, the Hungarian and Rumanian champions on some issue of principle, as you call it, would have been taken as seriously.

"If we accept that politics can play a role in the internal affairs of UEFA, we must ask ourselves what will happen to European football? Does UEFA want to divide it into an eastern part and a western part? You may find such a concept absurd. I can only say, most seriously, that the events of the past month have made such a step a dangerous possibility."

Sporting encounter

Austria seems specially fated to send one of its teams on a harmless sporting encounter and end up in a hornets' nest. A few months back the national team found their projected game against Greece cancelled after their arrival in Athens, because of the coup d'état. But even this was a mild affair, compared with the misfortunes of Rapid Vienna when they went to Prague for an Intertoto game with Dukla.

"It was a terrible journey," Martin Grassi, Rapid's general manager, told me over the telephone. "We've lodged an official protest with the Russian ambassador at Vienna about our treatment in Prague by the Russians. Unless we get an apology, we will never play against a Russian team in any competition.

"When the invasion happened, naturally we wanted to go home immediately. The friendliness and co-operation of Dukla's officials was in sharp contrast to the Russians' attitude. For days we could not even get a pass to travel along the main roads, which were all occupied by Soviet tanks.

"Eventually we were summoned by some pompous little attaché of the Russian ambassador in Prague. He gave us a pass with the air of a rich man offering charity to a beggar. He said: 'We have a lot better things to do than let you on a joy-ride around Czechoslovakia. I couldn't give a damn what happens to you, whether you are Austrian footballers or not. As far as I'm concerned, you're just another crowd of capitalists.' It was as much as I could do to stop our players lynching him in his own office."

The difficulties of Rapid, of course, have been reflected in the Austrian FA's decision to cancel two matches against Hungary scheduled for Salzburg and Budapest—"concern for the players' safety, not for political reasons", emphasised officials. Curiously Austria's new (and sole) selector is a Czech, Leopold Stasny, who comes from Bratislava. Stasny, previously employed by Innsbruck and Rapid, even has a Czech assistant, Frantisek Dufka, who I believe was in charge of Linz ASK last season. Their task has been made that bit more difficult by the loss of two matches at such a high level, for the hastily-arranged fixture with Switzerland (who cancelled their game with Poland because of the crisis) at Berne was a poor substitute. Not since 1954 have Austria made any sort of showing in the World Cup, and with West Germany and Scotland in their qualifying group, even a place in the last 16 at Mexico in 1970 appears beyond Stasny's limited powers.

Better condition

On a strictly practical level, the Russian invasion has brought acute difficulty for Czech football. The championship was interrupted for a month and will now end on December 8 instead of November 17. No training was possible for the first few weeks, because the Russians had taken over the stadia of Slavia and Dukla as military bases.

When Slavia's players eventually returned for training, they found tanks on the running track and the main practice ground torn to shreds by caterpillar tracks. Dukla's ground is in rather better condition, although until the Soviet troops moved out of Prague none of the players was allowed inside.

Apart from the European ties, cancelled under pressure from the eastern *bloc*, Czechoslovakia has been deprived of the home and away final of the Mitropa Cup, due to be played last month between Spartak Trnava and Red Star Belgrade. Even if public opinion had allowed it, Czechoslovakia could still not have sent a team to play Bulgaria at Sofia in September: the airfields were closed to all civil traffic. At least their first game abroad, against Denmark in the World Cup, ended in a 3-0 win—even if the unfit Czechs were flagging at the finish.

The strain of recent events proved too much for the president of Sparta Prague, Martin Fitch, better known for his work in the film industry. He died suddenly from a heart attack.

Grand reunion

At Avignon, though not on the lyrical bridge, two famous footballers had a grand reunion a few weeks ago. They arrived with a team you may remember, called Stade de Reims, now languishing in the second division of the French League. The players, too, you may remember: Raymond Kopa and Lucien Muller.

Kopa has been in retirement for well over a year. He is 37 now, with thinning hair and the lines that come from frowning at reports of commercial affairs. His main business is sports equipment, the *Group Kopa*, everything from soccer boots to camping equipment. But he has irons in several fires, including a plush hotel (the *Crystal*) at Reims with a delightful terrace garden; you can often see him sitting there, deep in discussion with an old colleague at the club, Jean Wendling.

Kopa has never been happy with inactivity. I saw him once or twice last season, fidgeting at matches, watching players fumble things he could still do with his eyes shut. Reims, in particular their energetic president, Perez, have been on at him for some time to re-sign. "It's a gamble," said Perez, "but one never knows how well it may turn out. Raymond says he'll only play in a few games, but I think he'll be invaluable — especially for the young players."

It's the youth which makes Kopa feel playing is worth while. "You can show tricks in training that never work on the field," he said. "There's no substitute for practical experience. I can give them the benefit of mine, and see their mistakes at first hand. There's a lot of talent at Reims, enormous possibilities. I've great hopes."

Kopa gets on well with the Reims' manager, Emil Rummelhardt. "He believes in technique above all, in bringing players up from the juniors. With a club like Reims, who haven't much money, that's the only way. People tend to forget that almost all the great team, in the '40s, were our own discoveries. It could be done again."

Before re-signing Kopa was given a medical examination at Angers, his first club. "It was an accident, really. I was staying with my wife in our villa here, and I went along to see what the new players were like. While I was there Dr. Kerjean—he's a vice-president—turned up to give them a check. Someone said, 'What about you, Raymond?', so I thought, why not? Kerjean said I 'was fit enough to be back in the field' and suddenly I knew I should play again. But I've told Rummelhardt that there's no room for nostalgia. I'll only play if I'm good enough. I want no favours at Reims—I'm always dispensable."

Kopa and Muller. Their careers have a curious parallel, for both went to Spain and returned to their former club. Muller has been in Spain for five years—at first, like Kopa, at Real Madrid, then at Barcelona.

"I could have stayed in Spain," explained Muller, "for several clubs were interested in me. But I'm 34, and the pace of first division football is pretty tough here. Barcelona reckoned I was slowing up, and they may be right; but it's only relative: their team runs around like lunatics.

"At first I didn't even think about going home to play. My wife's from Reims, and we spent our holidays there, with her parents. One day I went along to the club to watch a barrage match, you understand, for promotion or relegation. Serge Batteux—he's the technical director—said he wished he could have me back in the team. I told him I would like it, too. 'It's such a pity we could never afford it,' he sighed."

There the conversation ended until Muller received a letter from Batteux about the problems of the club, and casually mentioning the maximum they could afford to pay their professionals. Muller did not hesitate. "I'd like to come back," he told Batteux over the telephone, "if your committee want me. I can get more money in Spain, but it's Reims I want to play for."

So Muller returns home to share in the strange nostalgia that surrounds a great club in decline. "I can't explain why I've come," he said. "But wearing this shirt I feel a different man, like being reborn." Reims, too, with Kopa and Muller, dream of a grand renaissance.

Reluctantly transferred

Another famous player in France: Roger Magnusson, the Swedish international, whom Juventus have reluctantly transferred to Marseille. Magnusson now has playing experience in Sweden, Brazil, West Germany, Italy and France, which, especially for someone still only 23, is a remarkable record. Born at Blomstermala, in south-west Sweden, he played first for the second division club, Atvidaberg, had a winter with Flamengo in Rio, then was bought by Juventus and loaned to Cologne because

● *Continued on page 45*

Also in this issue...

p6
Eric Weil reported from Buenos Aires on the first leg of the Intercontinental Cup between Estudiantes and Manchester United, writing: "United gave what must surely rank as one of their worst performances. They literally handed the advantage to their opponents. That the latter won by only 1-0 merely showed their own limitations."

p21
Keir Radnedge's Player Portrait of the Yugoslav goalkeeper known as "Radi" noted: "Petar Radenkovic has always been an extrovert. He's always enjoyed standing out from the mediocrity round about him. Always the showman. He follows in the footsteps of his father, a renowned performer of folk music. The only difference is that Petar Radenkovic's stage is a football pitch."

p29
Andrew Dettre reported from Australia on a new arrival in Sydney. "Some three months ago at Mascot Airport, a tall, dark, balding man with a strong Aldo Ray look stepped from a jet airliner," he explained. "Some 2,000 Greeks at the airport went mad with joy. 'Is that some kind of pop singer?' asked a bystander. 'Pop singer?' replied a happily crying Greek youth. 'Momma, he's the greatest Greek player in the world.' So Takis Loukanidis arrived in Australia. Since that moment, Sydney soccer has not been the same."

p36
Revealing the struggles of Hungarian superstar Florian Albert, Eric Batty wrote: "Although 'Florrie' is something of a demi-god and could be a devastating player if he set his mind to it, the odds have been slowly stacking up against him for some time past. The mood in Budapest is veering to the view that Albert, currently the reigning European Footballer of the Year, is no longer the best player in Hungary nor even the best in the Ferencvaros squad. This distinction now falls at the feet of Zoltan Varga."

10 years ago
National manager Steve McClaren is portrayed in the English press as the "Wally with the Brolly" after his team lose 3-2 at home to Croatia in the Wembley rain and fail to qualify for Euro 2008.

20 years ago
A goalless draw at home to Mexico is enough for the "Reggae Boyz" of Jamaica to qualify for the World Cup finals for the first time in their history. Their nearest challengers El Salvador lose 4-2 away to the United States.

30 years ago
An 86th-minute goal by sub Gary Mackay gives Scotland a 1-0 win away to Bulgaria and means that Jack Charlton's Republic of Ireland qualify for the European Championship finals, their first major tournament, at Bulgaria's expense.

40 years ago
With a 3-1 victory over Bulgaria, France ensure qualification for the World Cup finals for the first time since 1966, thanks to goals from Dominique Rocheteau, Michel Platini and substitute Christian Dalger.

50 years ago
In the Intercontinental Cup replay, six players are sent-off as Racing beat Celtic 1-0. The Argentinians receive two red cards, while Celtic have four men dismissed – although Bertie Auld refuses to leave and carries on playing.

MISCELLANEOUS

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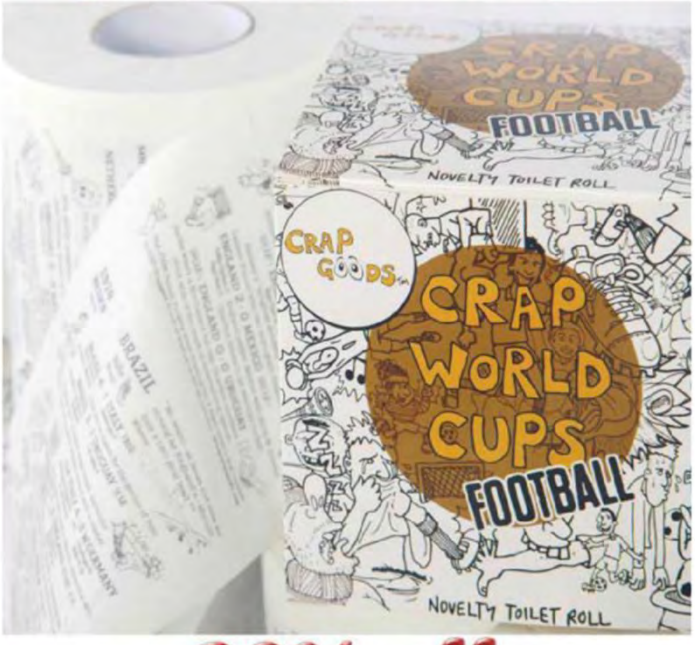

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World Service

NOW INCORPORATING Global diary

Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

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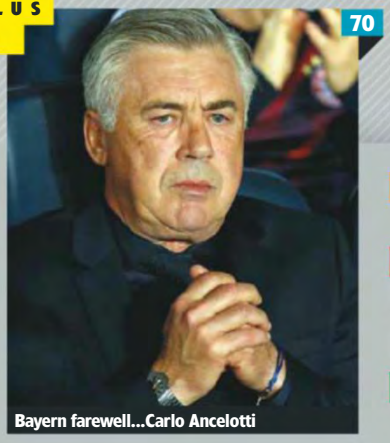

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Final appearance... Al Hilal's Mohammed Al Breik (in blue)

September 26-October 24, 2017

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Tuesday September 26

ITALY: Under fire after losing 2-0 to Sampdoria at the weekend, Milan boss Vincenzo Montella sacks fitness coach Emanuele Marra, claiming: "Physical preparation [is] among the areas where improvements can be made."
SAUDI ARABIA: Omar Kharbin scores three goals as Al Hilal beat Persepolis of Iran 4-0 in the home leg of their AFC Champions League semi-final, despite playing most of the second half with 10 men after Abdullah Otayf is sent off.
SPAIN: Manolo Marquez resigns after just six games as coach of Las Palmas. Cristiano Ronaldo marks his 400th game for Real Madrid with two goals in a 3-1 victory at Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League.

Wednesday September 27

BRAZIL: Cruzeiro beat Flamengo on penalties to win the Brazilian Cup after drawing 1-1 on aggregate.
CHINA: Hulk continues his record of scoring in every start in this year's AFC Champions League as Shanghai SIPG draw 1-1 in the first leg of their semi-final with Urawa Red Diamonds of Japan.
ENGLAND: Michy Batshuayi scores three minutes into added time as Chelsea come from behind to win 2-1 away at Atletico Madrid.
USA: MLS debutants Atlanta United seal a place in the play-offs with a 3-0 win over Philadelphia Union.

Thursday September 28

ENGLAND: Manchester City striker Sergio Aguero breaks a rib in a car crash in Amsterdam. City announce that Benjamin Mendy will undergo surgery after rupturing the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee and may not play again this season.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich sack coach Carlo Ancelotti and put Willy Sagnol in temporary control after Wednesday night's 3-0 defeat by Paris Saint-Germain.
MALAYSIA: The Asian Cup qualifier due to be played in Pyongyang on October 5 is postponed after the AFC is informed that the Malaysia Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued a travel ban on Malaysian nationals visiting North Korea.

Friday September 29

FRANCE: A stoppage-time equaliser from Souleymane Camara earns Montpellier a 1-1 draw at Monaco and keeps the hosts from top spot in Ligue 1.

Saturday September 30

ENGLAND: Crystal Palace lose 4-0 at Manchester United and equal an English league record by losing eight consecutive matches without scoring. Manchester City win 1-0 at defending champions Chelsea.
FRANCE: At least 29 people are hurt when a barrier collapses in the 16th minute of Lille's game at Amiens as away fans celebrate Fode Ballo-Toure's goal, causing the match to be abandoned.

Collapse...Lille fans are hurt at Amiens

Sunday October 1

AUSTRALIA: Tony Popovic quits as Western Sydney Wanderers coach a week before their opening game of the new A-League season.
ENGLAND: Arsene Wenger celebrates the 21st anniversary of his arrival at Arsenal with a 2-0 win against Brighton & Hove Albion.
SPAIN: Barcelona beat Las Palmas 3-0 in a game played behind closed doors in protest after their request for the fixture to be postponed in light of Catalonia's independence referendum was rejected. The Spanish government had declared the poll illegal.

Monday October 2

SPAIN: Barcelona's Gerard Pique, who voted in Sunday's Catalonian independence referendum, is jeered as the Spanish national team train in front of fans in Madrid.

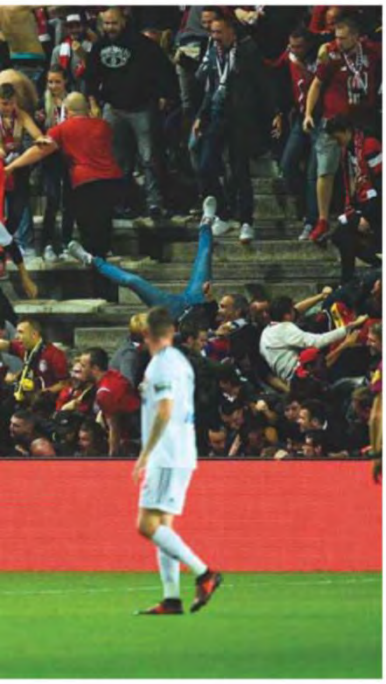
Tuesday October 3

FRANCE: It is revealed that a bomb plot was foiled on Saturday when an improvised explosive device was found near Paris Saint-Germain's Parc des Princes stadium just hours before their Ligue 1 fixture against Bordeaux.
ITALY: The Curva Nord of Lazio's Stadio Olimpico will be closed for two games following racist chanting by fans during Sunday's 6-1 home win against Sassuolo.

Wednesday October 4

WORLD CUP: Argentina, Uruguay

Heads...Cruzeiro (in blue) beat Flamengo in the Brazilian Cup Final



and Paraguay formally announce a joint plan to host the 2030 World Cup, although the bidding process will not begin for several years.

Thursday October 5

ENGLAND: A late goal from Harry Kane gives England a 1-0 win over Slovenia and secures qualification for the World Cup finals.
GERMANY: A 3-1 win in Northern Ireland confirms Germany's place in Russia next summer.
POLAND: Robert Lewandowski's hat-trick in a 6-1 thrashing of Armenia takes him to 50 goals and makes him Poland's all-time top scorer.
SYRIA: Omar Al Sama scores a late penalty as Syria draw 1-1 at home to Australia in the opening leg of their Asian play-off game.

Friday October 6

SPAIN: A 3-0 victory over Albania, combined with Italy's 1-1 draw with Macedonia, sees Spain finish top ➤

Winner ...Harry Kane

St Kitts & Nevis

STEVE MENARY

Islands have big plans

European experience works wonders in Caribbean

CONCACAF's decision to expand the Gold Cup to 16 teams is a great opportunity for sides such as St Kitts & Nevis, whose coach Jacques Passy believes that qualifying for the 2019 finals is not beyond the tiny islands' rapidly improving team.

"We have that as a short-term objective," says Passy. "Per capita, this is the most talented team in the world."

That is some claim, but one Passy can back up. In March, St Kitts & Nevis – a pair of Caribbean islands with a population of just 50,000 – reached 73 in the FIFA rankings. Many small countries have no games other than qualifiers for major tournaments and their ranking is low as much through inactivity as bad results. Passy recognised this before taking charge in 2015 and took his side to Europe, where they lost 3-0 in Estonia but beat Andorra 1-0.

"When you face Caribbean teams you know they will not be very organised defensively," says Passy. "After [the tour to Europe], the players understood that the balance and equilibrium was important.

"They attacked very well and began to understand what they needed to do when the attack broke down. They became a smart team as most of the Caribbean teams just like to attack. We are only in diapers in terms of what this team can do."

Passy took his team back to Europe this June for matches in Armenia and Georgia, and despite losing 5-0 and 3-0 respectively, the games offered a chance for his players to compete against the likes of Manchester United's Henrikh Mkhitaryan.

"Armenia was a great experience to play against players of those quality," says striker Zeph Thomas, who plays in England's Northern Premier League for Mickleover Sports. "When we play Caribbean teams next time we take a different experience. When we play a team like Haiti and go a goal down, hopefully we can respond in a better way."

Passy admits: "People say what are you doing spending $150,000 going to Armenia, Georgia, Estonia and Andorra? We will lose most of the time when we go to places like Georgia, but we took them to the 55th minute before they scored, and I don't even know if someone from St Kitts & Nevis has ever visited Tbilisi before."

While players such as Thomas and Brentford midfielder Romaine Sawyers have regularly turned out for St Kitts, Passy has now identified a pool of 28 eligible players in the UK and plans to hold a training camp in Britain soon.

> "Per capita, this is the most talented team in the world"
> National coach, Jacques Passy

No competitive games are likely until next year, however, and even then it will depend on the region's recovery from Hurricane Irma.

Meanwhile, all eyes are focused on the Gold Cup. "It's our World Cup," says national skipper Atiba Harris. "We should try to qualify and win some games when we are there." WS

Experience... in Armenia

➤ of their World Cup group.
GERMANY: Jupp Heynckes agrees to become Bayern Munich coach for a fourth time following the sacking of Carlo Ancelotti.

Saturday October 7

AUSTRALIA: A-League champions Sydney begin the new season with a 1-0 win at Melbourne Victory, who they beat in last term's Grand Final.
COSTA RICA: Kendall Watson's 95th-minute equaliser gives Costa Rica a 1-1 draw with Honduras and means they qualify for the World Cup with a game to spare.
CROATIA: Ante Cacic is sacked after Friday's 1-1 draw with Finland and replaced by Zlatko Dalic just two days before the deciding World Cup qualifier against Ukraine.
NIGERIA: Alex Iwobi is on target as Nigeria beat Zambia 1-0 and become the first African side to qualify for Russia 2018.
SWEDEN: Marcus Berg scores four goals in an 8-0 thrashing of Luxembourg as Sweden record their biggest-ever World Cup win.
USA: New York Red Bulls secure the last remaining MLS play-off spot in the Eastern Conference by beating Vancouver Whitecaps 3-0.

Sunday October 8

EGYPT: Mohamed Salah's stoppage-time penalty sees Egypt beat Congo 2-1 and clinch a place at the World Cup finals for the first time in 28 years.
POLAND: Robert Lewandowski scores a record-breaking 16th goal in a European World Cup qualifying campaign as Poland book their spot in Russia next summer with a 4-2 victory over Montenegro.

Monday October 9

ICELAND: A 2-0 win over Kosovo sends Iceland to the World Cup finals for the first time.
SERBIA: Aleksandar Prijovic's first-ever international goal sees off Georgia and secures Serbia's place at the World Cup finals.
SPAIN: Sergio Busquets wins his 100th cap for Spain, in a 1-0 away win against Israel.

Tuesday October 10

ARGENTINA: Lionel Messi earns Argentina a place in Russia with a hat-trick as they come from a goal down to win 3-1 in Ecuador.
AUSTRALIA: Two goals from Tim Cahill end Syria's World Cup dream as Australia win 2-1 in extra-time to set up a play-off with the fourth-placed CONCACAF qualifier.
CHILE: National coach Juan ➤

Germany

NICK BIDWELL

Heynckes relishing Bayern return

Former coach returns after Ancelotti sacking

Brought out of retirement to steady the Bayern Munich ship in the wake of Carlo Ancelotti's sacking, veteran coach Jupp Heynckes is relishing the chance to return to work, energised by the challenge of restoring momentum to a becalmed team.

Now in his fourth spell at the Bayern helm, the 72-year-old Heynckes might technically be a pensioner, yet he remains the most competitive of leadership animals, obsessed with detail, intolerant of mediocrity and brimming over with will-to-win.

"Some are old at 45; others are young at 70," declared Heynckes at his re-introductory press conference. "I fall into the second category. I understand there will be sceptics who point out that I've been out of the business for four years and that football has moved on. My reply is that the game hasn't been re-invented. I've kept a close eye on developments. I know how the game functions."

> "I understand there will be sceptics who point out I've been out of the business for four years and that football has moved on. My reply is that the game hasn't been re-invented" Jupp Heynckes

Bayern's decision to appoint Heynckes until the end of the season makes sense.

He knows the club intimately, many of the players from his last spell in charge (2011-13) are still on board and he has previous experience as interim boss there, succeeding the fired Jurgen Klinsmann in the spring of 2009.

An undisputed Bayern Hall of Famer since steering them to an historic treble in 2012-13, Heynckes is the ideal man to rally around. Both the board and fans adore him, and for his first game back in charge, a 5-0 victory at home to Freiburg, the euphoria at the Allianz-Arena was palpable.

Already there is a sense of renewal in the air, a conviction that the champions are no longer drifting.

That said, Heynckes still has a mountain of problems to resolve. Uncharacteristically for Bayern, fear and hesitancy have crept into the matchday psyche of late, a number of their stars have taken to living on their individual desert islands.

Heynckes is believed to be unhappy with the fitness levels of the group and also must find an antidote for the drop-off in form of such as Thomas Muller, David

Boss...Jupp Heynckes takes charge again

Alaba and Jerome Boateng.

So what can we expect from Heynckes Revisited? Certainly far less rotation, a greater team ethic and more intensity when pressing. In addition, a clear player pecking order, with everyone accepting their hierarchical position in the dressing room.

At the same time as his wife, Iris, undergoes an operation to fix a knee-ligament complaint, he has some surgery of his own to perform. "It's a difficult situation," commented Heynckes. "However, I've a precise plan and know exactly how to approach it.

"A lot will depend on my ability to communicate and what we achieve on the training ground."

Over to you Dr Heynckes. WS

Jupp's back...Bayern welcome home their former boss

➤ Antonio Pizzi resigns after a 3-0 defeat in Brazil means Chile will not be going to Russia next summer.

COLOMBIA: James Rodriguez's goal in a 1-1 draw in Peru means Colombia qualify for a second successive World Cup finals, while the hosts now face New Zealand in the play-offs.

FRANCE: *Les Bleus* reach next summer's World Cup finals with a 2-1 win at home to Belarus.

PANAMA: Roman Torres's winner two minutes from time secures Panama a 2-1 comeback win over Costa Rica and passage to the World Cup finals for the first time.

PORTUGAL: A 2-0 victory over Switzerland in Lisbon sees Portugal top their World Cup qualifying group, finishing ahead of their visitors on goal difference.

SOUTH KOREA: Busan IPark coach Cho Jin-ho, who played for South Korea at the 1994 World Cup, dies following a cardiac attack, aged 44.

URUGUAY: Edinson Cavani takes his tally to 10 and ends the qualifiers as South America's leading scorer as Uruguay beat Bolivia 4-2.

Wednesday October 11

PAKISTAN: FIFA suspends the Pakistan Football Federation following government interference. The ban cuts off funding from Zurich, and bars national and club teams from non-domestic games.

Thursday October 12

SWITZERLAND: Sion president Christian Constantin is banned for 14 months after he assaulted former national coach Rolf Fringer, who was working as a TV pundit, on the touchline during a league game against Lugano in September.

Friday October 13

ECUADOR: Five Ecuadorian players – named in local media as Enner Valencia, Jefferson Orejuela, Robert Arboleda, Gabriel Cortes and Joao Plata – are suspended from the national side for leaving the team hotel at night without permission in the build-up to Tuesday's 3-1 home defeat by Argentina.

FRANCE: Nabil Fekir scores with an injury-time free-kick as Lyon beat Monaco 3-2.

GERMANY: Chadrac Akolo scores an injury-time winner for Stuttgart minutes after VAR rules out a penalty for Cologne, who stay bottom of the Bundesliga.

SCOTLAND: Performance director at the Scottish FA, Malky Mackay ➤

Asia

JOHN DUERDEN

Showpiece competition down to the final two

Urawa Reds face Al Hilal in Champions League Final

On fire...Al Hilal's Omar Khribin

Step aside South Korea and China: the 2017 AFC Champions League trophy will either make a debut trip to Saudi Arabia or head to Japan for the first time since 2008, as Al Hilal and Urawa Reds meet in November's Final.

Despite their recent lack of success in this competition, which started in 2003, these are seriously big clubs.

Al Hilal are known as "The Boss" back in Saudi Arabia and see themselves as the primary West Asian outfit. They have won 14 national titles and lifted the forerunner to the Champions League in 1991 and 2000.

The Riyadh powerhouse are desperate to get their hands on this new version of the continental title after reaching the 2014 Final. Somehow, however, they managed to lose over two legs to Western Sydney Wanderers despite dominating the vast majority of the 180 minutes.

Saudi Arabian football is currently on the up following the national team's qualification for the World Cup, a first appearance since 2006. And with celebrations for that barely over, Al Hilal took on Iranian giants Persepolis.

There is no love lost between Iran and Saudi Arabia off or on the pitch. The rivals compete for mastery of West Asian football and in the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries games between them currently take place in neutral venues.

In the semi-finals, Persepolis "hosted" their Saudi rivals in Oman and lost 4-0 as Syrian striker Omar Khribin did the damage with a hat-trick. He also got both goals in the 2-2 draw in the second leg in Abu Dhabi as Al Hilal strolled into the Final.

Big-spending Shanghai SIPG, led by Andre Villas-Boas, emerged victorious from their quarter-final against fierce Chinese rivals Guangzhou Evergrande in a battle of the top two of the Chinese Super League and two ex-Chelsea coaches.

Al Hilal will start favourites in the Final against Urawa Reds, and in Syria's Omar Khribin they have one of the hottest strikers in Asia

Luiz Felipe Scolari had led Guangzhou to the 2015 continental title but his side were blown away in the first leg in Shanghai. Hulk opened the scoring and a second-half brace from the mercurial Wu Lei gave the delirious home fans a 4-0 win.

In the return, Alan Junior scored two first-half goals to give Guangzhou hope. Fellow Brazilian Ricardo Goulart then got two more in the final minutes to send scores of Chinese journalists and their deadlines into meltdown and the tie into extra-time.

Going through... Urawa Reds' Yuki Muto (left) in action against Shanghai SIPG

Hulk scored in the second period but because away goals in extra-time do not count double in the Asian Champions League, Goulart's third meant it was 5-1 on the night, 5-5 on aggregate and time for a penalty shoot-out.

Goulart, the hat-trick hero, was the only player to miss from the spot as Shanghai triumphed 5-4 to earn a semi-final with Urawa, who had eliminated fellow Japanese team Kawasaki Frontale.

Urawa had claim to be Asia's biggest club before Guangzhou started spending

Shoot-out... Guangzhou Evergrande prepare for penalties against Shanghai SIPG

and winning titles at home and overseas. Yet the 2006 J.League title and Asian win the following year remain their only major titles.

In the first leg of their semi-final in Shanghai, Urawa picked up an encouraging 1-1 draw and at home, in front of 60,000 at Saitama Stadium just north of Tokyo, they scored the only goal of the game – a Rafael Silva header from a corner.

Led by former Argentina international Ramon Diaz, Al Hilal have a strong spine of Saudi stars interspersed with South American talent and will start favourites in the Final. And in Syria's Khribin they have one of the hottest strikers in Asia.

Urawa, who have developed a reputation for choking domestically when the pressure is on, have plenty of firepower going forward with Shinzo Koroki and Silva. However, they have a porous defence – the team has the second-highest goals against column in the 18-team Japanese top flight – which means they could struggle to keep out the talented Saudi front line. WS

➤ is appointed interim manager for November's friendly against Holland after Gordon Strachan steps down the previous day.

USA: Bruce Arena resigns as coach three days after a 2-1 loss to Trinidad & Tobago ended the USA's World Cup hopes.

Saturday October 14

ENGLAND: Manchester City thrash Stoke City 7-2, while Crystal Palace score their first league goals of the season in a 2-1 win over Chelsea.

ITALY: Juventus suffer their first home defeat in two years, going down 2-1 to Lazio.

SPAIN: A late Luis Suarez equaliser cancels out Saul Niguez's early strike as Atletico Madrid and Barcelona draw 1-1.

Sunday October 15

INDONESIA: Choirul Huda, a goalkeeper with top-flight Persela Lamongan, dies following a collision with a team-mate in a league match against Semen Padang.

ITALY: Mauro Icardi completes a hat-trick with an injury-time penalty to give Internazionale a 3-2 derby win over Milan.

SPAIN: Valencia move into second place with a thrilling 6-3 victory over Real Betis.

Tuesday October 17

ENGLAND: Leicester City sack manager Craig Shakespeare.

Wednesday October 18

BRAZIL: Corinthians draw 0-0 with nearest challengers Gremio to stay top of the championship table.

LATVIA: Liepaja beat Riga 2–0 in the Latvian Cup Final.

GERMANY: Thomas Muller scores in a 10th successive Champions League campaign as Bayern Munich beat Celtic 3-0 .

SPAIN: Lionel Messi scores his 100th European goal for Barcelona in a 3-1 win over Olympiakos.

Thursday October 19

ALGERIA: Rabah Madjer succeeds Lucas Alcaraz and is Algeria's fifth national coach in three years.

USA: Landon Donovan is reported to be considering standing for president of the US federation.

Friday October 20

RUSSIA: Sepp Blatter will attend next year's World Cup finals as a guest of Vladimir Putin.

Saturday October 21

ENGLAND: Huddersfield Town beat Manchester United for the first time in 65 years. United's 2-1 defeat leaves Manchester City, who win 3-0 against Burnley, as the Premier League's only unbeaten side.

ITALY: Napoli's perfect start to Serie A ends with a goalless draw at home to Internazionale, who are the only other unbeaten side in the Italian top flight this term.

MOROCCO: Two goals from Achraf Bencharki help Wydad to beat Algeria's USM Alger 3-1 and reach the CAF Champions League Final.

Sunday October 22

CHINA: Guangzhou Evergrande seal a record seventh successive league title with a 5-1 win over Guizhou Hengfeng Zhicheng.

EGYPT: Al Ahly thrash Etoile du Sahel 6-2 in the second leg of their CAF Champions League semi-final to win 7-3 on aggregate. Ibrahim Konsha of second-tier side El Qanah is killed by Islamist militants while fulfilling his national service.

FRANCE: Bottom club Metz sack Philippe Hinschberger. Neymar is sent off as Paris Saint-Germain draw 2-2 at Marseille.

SPAIN: Leganes beat Athletic Bilbao 1-0 and extend their run without conceding a goal to 487 minutes – the longest current run in Europe's top five leagues.

USA: Toronto draw 2-2 with Atlanta United and set a new MLS record of 69 points. A goal in injury time gives San Jose Earthquakes a 3-2 win over Minnesota and secures the final play-off berth on the last day of the regular season.

Monday October 23

ENGLAND: Everton sack manager Ronald Koeman after Sunday's 5-2 defeat at home to Arsenal left them in the relegation zone.

FIFA: Cristiano Ronaldo is named Best Men's Player at The Best FIFA Football Awards in London.

USA: Montreal Impact dismiss coach Mauro Biello after losing nine of their last 10 games and finishing 11 points from a play-off spot.

Tuesday October 24

ITALY: Roberto De Zerbi replaces Marco Baroni as Benevento coach following nine successive defeats – the worst start to a season in Serie A history. Juventus keeper Gianluigi Buffon says he will retire in the summer – unless his side win the Champions League.

SPAIN: Deportivo La Coruna sack Pepe Mel after Monday's 2-1 home loss to Girona and put youth-team coach Cristobal Parralo in charge until the end of the season. WS

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

HOW IT WORKS Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

David DE GEA (Manchester United)	6
Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	3
Thibaut COURTOIS (Chelsea)	1
EDERSON (Manchester City)	1
Samir HANDANOVIC (Internazionale)	1
Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (Barcelona)	1

DEFENDERS

Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	7
Dani ALVES (Paris Saint-Germain)	5
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	4
John STONES (Manchester City)	4
Faouzi GHOULAM (Napoli)	3
Nicolas OTAMENDI (Manchester City)	3
Cesar AZPILICUETA (Chelsea)	2
Marc BARTRA (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Kalidou KOULIBALY (Napoli)	2
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	2
Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	2
Milan SKRINIAR (Internazionale)	2
Antonio VALENCIA (Manchester United)	2
Kyle WALKER (Manchester City)	2
Phil JONES (Manchester United)	1
Joshua KIMMICH (Bayern Munich)	1
Aleksandar KOLAROV (Roma)	1
Layvin KURZAWA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Thomas MEUNIER (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Lukasz PISZCZEK (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Raphael VARANE (Real Madrid)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	10
ISCO (Real Madrid)	3
Nuri SAHIN (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Marek HAMSIK (Napoli)	2
Nemanja MATIC (Manchester United)	2
David SILVA (Manchester City)	2
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	1
DANILO (Porto)	1
Marouane FELLAINI (Manchester United)	1
Alejandro GOMEZ (Atalanta)	1
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	1
Dries MERTENS (Napoli)	1
Luka MODRIC (Real Madrid)	1
Maximilian PHILIPP (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Christian PULISIC (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Marco VERRATTI (Paris Saint-Germain)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	10
Paulo DYBALA (Juventus)	8
NEYMAR (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Harry KANE (Tottenham Hotspur)	7
Romelu LUKAKU (Manchester United)	7
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	2
Radamel FALCAO (Monaco)	2
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Ciro IMMOBILE (Lazio)	1

Internationals

2018 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

EUROPE section

● 13 finals places available (excluding the place for hosts **Russia**, who qualify automatically)

Group A

Oct 7 - Borisov
Belarus 1 (Volodko 55)
Holland 3 (Propper 24, Robben pen 84, Depay 90+3)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 6,850. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)
Belarus: Chernik - Rios, Politevich, Yanushkevich, Volodko, Balanovich (Burko 76), Maevski, Karnitski, Dragun, Stasevich, Signevich (Saroka 87).
Holland: Cillessen - Janmaat, Van Dijk, Rekik, Blind, Wijnaldum, Vilhena (Dost 56), Robben, Propper (Klaassen 83), Babel, Janssen (Depay 68).

Oct 7 - Sofia
Bulgaria 0
France 1 (Matuidi 3)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 16,000. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)
Bulgaria: P Iliev - S Popov, Bodurov, Bozhikov, Zanev, Manolev (Dimitrov 87), Slavchev, Kostadinov, Nedelev, Galabinov (Kraev 48), Delev.
France: Lloris - Sidibe, Varane, Umtiti, Digne, Tolisso, Kante (Rabiot 34), Matuidi, Griezmann, Lacazette (Payet 76), Mbappe (Giroud 84).

Oct 7 - Stockholm
Sweden 8 (Granqvist pen 10, pen 67, Berg 18, 37, 54, 71, Lustig 60, Toivonen 76)
Luxembourg 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 50,022. **Ref:** Gocek (Tur)
Sweden: Olsen - Lustig (Krafth 60), Granqvist (Helander 81), Lindelof, Augustinsson, Claesson, Sebastian Larsson, J Johansson, Forsberg, Toivonen, Berg (Kiese Thelin 74).
Luxembourg: Joubert - Holter, Philipps, Malget, Janisch, C Martins (Skenderovic 72), Mutsch, V Thill (Turpel 46), O Thill (Rodrigues 46), Joachim, Da Mota.

Oct10 - Paris
France 2 (Griezmann 27, Giroud 33)
Belarus 1 (Saroka 44)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 78,000. **Ref:** Ozkahya (Tur)
France: Lloris - Sidibe, Varane, Umtiti, Digne, Coman (Mbappe 61), Tolisso, Matuidi, Lemar (Payet 83), Giroud, Griezmann (Sissoko 78).
Belarus: Chernik - Matveichyk, Yanushkevich (Sachivko 46), Politevich, Volodko, Dragun, Karnitski, Korzun (Bykov 79), Kovalev (Skavysh 65), Saroka, Stasevich.

Oct10 - Amsterdam
Holland 2 (Robben pen 16, 40)
Sweden 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 41,244. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)
Holland: Cillessen - Tete (Janmaat 71), Van Dijk, Rekik, Ake, Vilhena, Wijnaldum (Klaassen 71), Blind, Robben, Janssen (Dost 46), Babel.
Sweden: Olsen - Lustig, Lindelof, Granqvist, Augustinsson, Claesson (G Svensson 68), Sebastian Larsson (M Olsson 82), J Johansson, Forsberg, Toivonen (Kiese Thelin 76), Berg.

Oct10 - Luxembourg
Luxembourg 1 (O Thill 3)
Bulgaria 1 (Chochev 68)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Vad (Hun)
Luxembourg: Joubert - Jans (M Martins 81), C Martins, Malget, Janisch, O Thill, Philipps, Skenderovic, Turpel, Joachim (Sinani 85), Rodrigues (Da Mota 60).
Bulgaria: P Iliev - S Popov, Bodurov, Bozhikov, Zanev (Nedyalkov 14), Kraev (Galabinov 49), Slavchev (Rainov 62), Chochev, Nedelev, I Popov, Delev.

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France (QF)	10	7	2	1	18	6	23
Sweden (QPO)	10	6	1	3	26	9	19
Holland	10	6	1	3	21	12	19
Bulgaria	10	4	1	5	14	19	13
Luxembourg	10	1	3	6	8	26	6
Belarus	10	1	2	7	6	21	5

Group B

Oct 7 - Andorra La Vella
Andorra 0
Portugal 2 (Cristiano Ronaldo 63, Andre Silva 86)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 3,193. **Ref:** Zelinka (CzR)
Andorra: Gomes - Jesus Rubio, Lima, Llovera, San Nicolas, Rodriguez (Juli Sanchez 87), Rebes, Vales, Clemente (A Martinez 78), M Vieira (Moreno 90), Alaez.
Portugal: Rui Patricio - Nelson Semedo, Pepe, Luis Neto, Eliseu, Gelson Martins (Cristiano Ronaldo 46), Danilo Pereira, Joao Mario, Quaresma (William Carvalho 79), Andre Silva (Goncalo Guedes 90), Bernardo Silva.

Oct 7 - Torshavn
Faroe Islands 0
Latvia 0
Att: 4,203. **Ref:** Schorgenhofer (Aut)
Faroe Islands: G Nielsen - Naes, Nattestad, Gregersen, V Davidsen, Vatnhamar (Bartalsstovu 87), Benjaminsen, Hansson (R Joensen 65), Sorensen, Jakobsen (P Johannesen 77), Edmundsson.
Latvia: Vanins - Freimanis, Tarasovs, Gorkss, Kolesovs, Maksimenko, O Laizans, Kazacoks (A Visnakovs 66), Kluskins, Sabala (E Visnakovs 83), D Ikaunieks (Uldrikis 74).

Oct 7 - Basle
Switzerland 5 (Xhaka 18, Frei 20, Zuber 43, 49, Lichtsteiner 83)
Hungary 2 (Guzmics 59, Ugrai 89)
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 32,018. **Ref:** Tagliavento (Ita)
Switzerland: Sommer - Lichtsteiner, Schar, Djourou, Moubandje, Shaqiri, Freuler (Derdiyok 84), Frei (Zakaria 73), Xhaka, Zuber, Seferovic (Embolo 63).
Hungary: Gulacsi - Bese (Lang 32), Guzmics, Kadar, Korhut, R Varga (Sallai 69), A Nagy, Patkai, Elek (Markvart 56), Lovrencsics, Ugrai.

Oct10 - Budapest
Hungary 1 (Bode 81)
Faroe Islands 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Reinshreiber (Isr)
Hungary: Gulacsi - Fiola, Guzmics, Kadar, Szabo, Stieber (D Nagy 66), Patkai, A Nagy, Dzsudzsak, Ugrai (Sallai 89), Eppel (Bode 46).
Faroe Islands: G Nielsen - Naes, Faero (K Olsen 88), Gregersen, Baldvinsson, Jonsson, Vatnhamar, Benjaminsen (Hansson 66), R Joensen, Sorensen (Bartalsstovu 73), Edmundsson.

Oct10 - Riga
Latvia 4 (D Ikaunieks 11, Sabala 19, 59, Tarasovs 63)
Andorra 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 4,153. **Ref:** Kristoffersen (Den)
Latvia: Vanins - Gabovs (A Visnakovs 65), Kolesovs, Dubra, Tarasovs, Solovjovs, Kluskins (Ulimbasevs 81), Indrans, Torres, D Ikaunieks (Uldrikis 71), Sabala.
Andorra: Gomes - Jesus Rubio, E Garcia, Lima, Llovera, M Garcia, M Vieira (Riera 87), Rebes, Clemente (A Martinez 63), Pujol, Alaez (Juli Sanchez 83).

Oct10 - Lisbon
Portugal 2 (Djourou og 41, Andre Silva 57)
Switzerland 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 61,500. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)
Portugal: Rui Patricio - Cedric, Pepe, Jose Fonte, Eliseu (Antunes 68), Joao Mario (Danilo Pereira 90+1), Joao Moutinho, William Carvalho, Bernardo Silva, Andre Silva (Andre Gomes 75), Cristiano Ronaldo.
Switzerland: Sommer - Lichtsteiner, Schar, Djourou, Rodriguez, Freuler (Zakaria 46), Dzemaili (Zuber 66), Xhaka, Shaqiri, Seferovic, Mehmedi (Embolo 66).

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal (QF)	10	9	0	1	32	4	27
Switz'd (QPO)	10	9	0	1	23	7	27
Hungary	10	4	1	5	14	14	13
Faroe Islands	10	2	3	5	4	16	9
Latvia	10	2	1	7	7	18	7
Andorra	10	1	1	8	2	23	4

Group C

Oct 5 - Baku
Azerbaijan 1 (Ismayilov pen 55)
Czech Republic 2 (Kopic 35, Barak 66)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 16,200. **Ref:** Millot (Fra)
Azerbaijan: K Agayev - Mirzabekov, B Huseynov, R F Sadygov, Pashayev, Ismayilov, J Huseynov (Madatov 79), Amirguliyev, Richard Almeida, Nazarov (Garayev 67), R Kurbanov (Sheydaev 62).
Czech Republic: Pavlenka - Kaderabek, Brabec, Suchy, Boril, Darida (Soucek 78), Husbauer, Kopic, Barak, Jankto, Krmencik (Kliment 89).

Oct 5 - Belfast
Northern Ireland 1 (Magennis 90+3)
Germany 3 (Rudy 2, Wagner 21, Kimmich 86)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 18,104. **Ref:** Makkelie (Hol)
Northern Ireland: McGovern - C McLaughlin, J Evans, McAuley, Hodson (Dallas 46), Brunt, Norwood, Davis, C Evans (Saville 80), Magennis, K Lafferty (Washington 69).
Germany: Ter Stegen - Kimmich, Boateng, Hummels, Plattenhardt, Rudy, Kroos, Goretzka (Can 66), Muller (Stindl 83), Draxler (Sane 72), Wagner.

Oct 5 - Serravalle
San Marino 0
Norway 8 (Henriksen 8, King pen 14, 17, M Elyounoussi 39, 48, 68, Selnaes 58, Linnes 86)
HT: 0-4. **Att:** 1,922. **Ref:** Dallas (Sco)
San Marino: A Simoncini - Brolli, D Simoncini, Cevoli, Grandoni, F Berardi (Bonini 67), A Gasperoni, Cervellini (Rinaldi 80), Battistini, Palazzi, Bernardi (Tomassini 89).
Norway: Jarstein - Svensson, Nordtveit, Valsvik, Meling, M Elyounoussi (T Elyounoussi 71), Berge (Selnaes 46), Henriksen, Linnes, King (Soderlund 62), Sorloth.

Oct 8 - Plzen
Czech Republic 5 (Krmencik 8, 23, Kopic 27, Novak 71, V Kadlec 83)
San Marino 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 5,625. **Ref:** Troleis (Far)
Czech Republic: Koubek - Kaderabek, Kalas, Luftner, Novak, Kopic (Sykora 63), Dockal, Darida, Jankto, Barak (V Kadlec 70), Krmencik (Kliment 63).
San Marino: A Simoncini - Brolli, F Vitaioli (M Berardi 82), Alessandro Della Valle, Palazzi, Grandoni, Tosi, Battistini, F Berardi (Berretti 76), Rinaldi, Bernardi (Bonini 63).

Oct 8 - Kaiserslautern
Germany 5 (Goretzka 9, 66, Wagner 54, Rudiger 64, Can 81)
Azerbaijan 1 (Sheydaev 34)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 37,613. **Ref:** Treimanis (Lat)
Germany: Leno - Kimmich, Mustafi (Ginter 36), Sule (Rudiger 22), Brandt, Can, Sane, Goretzka, Muller (Younes 70), Stindl, Wagner.
Azerbaijan: K Agayev - Mirzabekov, B Huseynov, Abisov, Khalilzade, Garayev, Ismayilov (R Kurbanov 77), Amirguliyev, Richard Almeida, J Huseynov (Nazarov 69), Sheydaev (Alaskarov 87).

Oct 8 - Oslo
Norway 1 (Brunt og 71)
Northern Ireland 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,244. **Ref:** Boiko (Ukr)
Norway: Nyland - Svensson, Nordtveit, Reginiussen, Meling, M Elyounoussi (T Elyounoussi 71), Berge, Henriksen (Selnaes 83), Johansen (Linnes 88), Sorloth, Soderlund.
Northern Ireland: McGovern - C McLaughlin, McAuley, J Evans, Brunt, Davis, C Evans (Ferguson 79), Norwood (Saville 46), Magennis, Washington (K Lafferty 69), Dallas.

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany (QF)	10	10	0	0	43	4	30
N Ireland (QPO)	10	6	1	3	17	6	19
Czech Rep	10	4	3	3	17	10	15
Norway	10	4	1	5	17	16	13
Azerbaijan	10	3	1	6	10	19	10
San Marino	10	0	0	10	2	51	0

Group D

Oct 6 - Vienna
Austria 3 (Burgstaller 25, Arnautovic 76, Schaub 89)
Serbia 2 (Milivojevic 11, Matic 83)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 42,400. **Ref:** Kralovec (CzR)
Austria: Lindner - Bauer, Dragovic, Danso, Wober, Grillitsch (Lazaro 77), Baumgartlinger, Kainz (Schaub 61), Ilsanker, Arnautovic, Burgstaller (Gregoritsch 82).
Serbia: Stojkovic - Ivanovic, S Mitrovic, Nastasic, Rukavina (Ljajic 69), Milivojevic, Matic, Kolarov, Gacinovic (Prijovic 87), Tadic, A Mitrovic.

Oct 6 - Tbilisi
Georgia 0
Wales 1 (Lawrence 49)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 22,290. **Ref:** Gil Manzano (Spa)
Georgia: Loria - Kakabadze, Kverkvelia, Kashia, Navalovski, Merebashvili, Kankava, Kvekveskiri (Jigauri 76), Gvilia (Khocholava 89), Kazaishvili, Kvilitaia (Skhirtladze 76).
Wales: Hennessey - Gunter, A Williams, Chester, B Davies, King, Allen, Ledley (D Edwards 82), Ramsey, Lawrence (Woodburn 90+1), Vokes (Robson-Kanu 74).

Oct 6 - Dublin
Republic of Ireland 2 (Murphy 2, 19)
Moldova 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 50,560. **Ref:** Nijhuis (Hol)
Republic of Ireland: Randolph - Christie, Duffy, Clark, Ward, Hoolahan (McGeady 79), Meyler, Hendrick, O'Dowda, S Long (Maguire 83), Murphy (Arter 79).
Moldova: Cebanu - Bordian, Racu, Epureanu, Rozgoniuc, Platica (Ambros 79), Gatcan, Anton, Ionita, Dedov (Cociuc 55), Ginsari.
Sent off: Gatcan 90+2.

Oct 9 - Chisinau
Moldova 0
Austria 1 (Schaub 69)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vertenten (Blg)
Moldova: Cebanu - Bordian, Bolohan (Paireli 86), Epureanu, Rozgoniuc, Ionita, Anton, Platica (Ambros 80), Cociuc, Ivanov (Cojocari 70), Ginsari. *Sent off: Ionita 55.*
Austria: Lindner - Bauer, Lienhart, Danso, Wober, Grillitsch, Baumgartlinger, Schaub, Kainz (Lazaro 59), Arnautovic (Schobesberger 81), Burgstaller (Janko 46).

Oct 9 - Belgrade
Serbia 1 (Prijovic 74)
Georgia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 40,000. **Ref:** Gil (Pol)
Serbia: Stojkovic - Ivanovic, Nikola Maksimovic, D Tosic, Rukavina, Matic, Gudelj, Kolarov, Ljajic (Prijovic 61), Tadic (Kostic 88), A Mitrovic (Milivojevic 76).
Georgia: Makaridze - Kakabadze, Kashia, Khocholava, Navalovski, Kankava, Kazaishvili, Gvilia, Aburjania (Dvalishvili 82), Jigauri (Hufnagel 86), Kvilitaia (Merebashvili 78).

Oct 9 - Cardiff
Wales 0
Republic of Ireland 1 (McClean 57)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)
Wales: Hennessey - Gunter, A Williams, Chester, B Davies, King (Woodburn 65), Allen (J Williams 37), Ledley, Ramsey, Lawrence, Robson-Kanu (Vokes 71).
Republic of Ireland: Randolph - Christie, Duffy, Clark, Ward, Arter (Whelan 78), Brady, Meyler, Hendrick, McClean, Murphy (K Long 90+2).

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Serbia (QF)	10	6	3	1	20	10	21
R Ireland (QPO)	10	5	4	1	12	6	19
Wales	10	4	5	1	13	6	17
Austria	10	4	3	3	14	12	15
Georgia	10	0	5	5	8	14	5
Moldova	10	0	2	8	4	23	2

Group E

Oct 5 - Yerevan
Armenia 1 (Hambartsumyan 39)
Poland 6 (Grosicki 2, Lewandowski 18, 25, 64, Blaszczykowski 58, Wolski 89)
HT: 1-3. **Att:** 5,478. **Ref:** Jug (Sln)
Armenia: Meliksetyan - K Hovhannisyan, Hambartsumyan, T Voskanyan, Artak Yedigaryan, G Malakyan, Kadimyan (E Malakyan 62), Koryan (E Manucharyan 66), Mkhitaryan, Adamyan (Manoyan 73), Barseghyan.
Poland: Szczesny - Piszczek, Glik, Pazdan (Cionek 85), Bereszynski, Blaszczykowski, Krychowiak, Linetty (Maczynski 59), Grosicki (Wolski 72), Lewandowski, Zielinski.

Oct 5 - Podgorica
Montenegro 0
Denmark 1 (Eriksen 16)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 10,779. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)
Montenegro: Petkovic - Marusic, Savic, Simic, Tomasevic, N Vukcevic, Ivanic, Jankovic (Jovovic 85), Jovetic (Djordjevic 20), Vesovic, Mugosa (Kojasevic 76).

Denmark: Schmeichel - Dalsgaard, Kjaer, Bjelland, Larsen (Durmisi 43), Kvist, Delaney, Eriksen, Y Poulsen, Cornelius (Bendtner 64), Sisto.

Oct 5 - Ploiesti
Romania 3 (Budescu 33, pen 38, Keseru 73)
Kazakhstan 1 (Turysbek 82)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 10,123. **Ref:** Scharer (Swi)
Romania: Tatarusanu - Benzar, Chiriches, D Grigore, Ganea, Pintilii (Hoban 70), Marin, Chipciu, Budescu (Ionita 79), Grozav, Andone (Keseru 66).
Kazakhstan: Pokatilov - Beisebekov, Maliy, Akhmetov, Dmitrenko, Suyumbayev, Tagybergen (Turysbek 65), Kuat, Darabayev, Nurgaliyev (Khizhnichenko 46), Murtazayev (Schetkin 58).

Oct 8 - Copenhagen
Denmark 1 (Eriksen pen 60)
Romania 1 (Deac 88)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 36,084. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)
Denmark: Schmeichel - Dalsgaard, Kjaer, A Christensen, Durmisi, Kvist, Delaney, Y Poulsen (Schone 83), Eriksen, Sisto, Bendtner (Dolberg 70).
Romania: Tatarusanu - Balasa, Chiriches, D Grigore, Ganea, Hoban, Stanciu, Baluta (Tucudean 83), Budescu (Bancu 66), Deac, Andone (Keseru 70). *Sent off: Ganea 63.*

Oct 8 - Astana
Kazakhstan 1 (Turysbek 64)
Armenia 1 (Mkhitaryan 26)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 12,158. **Ref:** Tean (Mol)
Kazakhstan: Loria - Miroshnichenko, Logvinenko, Dmitrenko, Akhmetov, Tungyshbayev (Khizhnichenko 46), Nurgaliyev, Tagybergen, M Baizhanov (Darabayev 75), Turysbek, Murtazayev.
Armenia: Beglaryan - Hambartsumyan, Mikaelyan (Andonian 67), Haroyan, Daghbashyan, A Grigoryan, Simonyan, Mkhitaryan, Pizzelli (Koryan 70), E Malakyan (K Hovhannisyan 59), Adamyan.

Oct 8 - Warsaw
Poland 4 (Maczynski 6, Grosicki 16, Lewandowski 85, Stojkovic og 87)
Montenegro 2 (Mugosa 78, Tomasevic 83)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 57,538. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)
Poland: Szczesny - Piszczek (Rybus 46), Glik, Pazdan, Bereszynski, Krychowiak, Maczynski (Wolski 90+2), Blaszczykowski, Zielinski, Grosicki (Makuszewski 90), Lewandowski.
Montenegro: Petkovic - Stojkovic, Klimenta, Mijuskovic, Tomasevic, Scekic, N Vukcevic, Jankovic, Ivanic (Haksabanovic 67), Jovovic (Mugosa 77), Beciraj.

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP E – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Poland (QF)	10	8	1	1	28	14	25
Denmark (QPO)	10	6	2	2	20	8	20
Montenegro	10	5	1	4	20	12	16
Romania	10	3	4	3	12	10	13
Armenia	10	2	1	7	10	26	7
Kazakhstan	10	0	3	7	6	26	3

Group F

Oct 5 - London
England 1 (Kane 90+4)
Slovenia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 61,598. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)
England: Hart - Walker, Stones, Cahill, Bertrand, Henderson, Dier, Oxlade-Chamberlain (Lingard 64), Sterling (Keane 85), Rashford, Kane.
Slovenia: Oblak - Aljaz Struna, Mevlja, Cesar, Jokic, Rotman (Matavz 79), Krhin, Bezjak (Repas 72), Ilicic, Verbic, Sporar (Birsa 55).

Oct 5 - Valletta
Malta 1 (Agius 23)
Lithuania 1 (Slivka 53)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 3,431. **Ref:** Hovhannisyan (Arm)
Malta: Hogg - R Camilleri, S Borg, Z Muscat, J Zerafa, S Pisani, P Fenech (Attard 90+1), Agius, Gambin (C Borg 85), Schembri (Failla 46), Effiong.
Lithuania: Zubas - Vaitkunas, Girdvainis, Mikuckis, Andriuskevicius, Kuklys, Matulevicius (Spalvis 80), Slivka, Cernych, Valskis (Papsys 46), Novikovas.

Oct 5 - Glasgow
Scotland 1 (Skrtel og 89)
Slovakia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 46,773. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)
Scotland: Gordon - Berra, Mulgrew, Robertson, Tierney (Anya 82), Morrison, D Fletcher (McArthur 79), Bannan, Forrest (C Martin 61), Griffiths, Phillips.
Slovakia: Dubravka - Pekarik, Skrtel, Durica, Hubocan, Kucka (Gyomber 80), Gregus, Lobotka, Mak, Nemec (Weiss 79), Hamsik (Duda 79). *Sent off: Mak 23.*

Oct 8 - Vilnius
Lithuania 0
England 1 (Kane pen 27)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 5,067. **Ref:** Grinfeeld (Isr)
Lithuania: Setkus - Andriuskevicius, Girdvainis, Zulpa, L Klimavicius, Borovskij, Verbickas, Slivka (Chvedukas 90+1), Novikovas, Sernas (Matulevicius 76), Cernych.
England: Butland - Keane, Stones, Maguire, Trippier, Winks, Henderson, Cresswell, Alli (Lingard 81), Kane, Rashford (Sturridge 72).

Oct 8 - Trnava
Slovakia 3 (Nemec 33, 62, Duda 69)
Malta 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 17,774. **Ref:** Mazzoleni (Ita)
Slovakia: Dubravka - Pekarik, Skrtel, Skriniar, Hubocan (Mazan 87), Rusnak (Mihalik 87), Duda, Lobotka, Hamsik, Weiss, Nemec.
Malta: Hogg - S Borg, Agius, R Camilleri, J Zerafa, S Pisani, R Fenech, P Fenech (C Borg 88), Gambin (Failla 76), Effiong, Schembri.

Oct 8 - Ljubljana
Slovenia 2 (Bezjak 52, 72)
Scotland 2 (Griffiths 32, Snodgrass 88)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 11,123. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
Slovenia: Oblak - Aljaz Struna (Skubic 46), Mevlja, Cesar, Jokic, Kurtic, Rotman, Repas (Bezjak 46), Ilicic, Verbic, Matavz (Vetrih 89). *Sent off: Cesar 90+2.*
Scotland: Gordon - Berra, Mulgrew, Robertson, Tierney (S Fletcher 80), McArthur (Snodgrass 79), D Fletcher, Bannan, C Martin (Anya 53), Griffiths, Phillips.

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP F – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England (QF)	10	8	2	0	18	3	26
Slovakia	10	6	0	4	17	7	18
Scotland	10	5	3	2	17	12	18
Slovenia	10	4	3	3	12	7	15
Lithuania	10	1	3	6	7	20	6
Malta	10	0	1	9	3	25	1

Group G

Oct 6 - Turin
Italy 1 (Chiellini 40)
Macedonia 1 (Trajkovski 77)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 22,603. **Ref:** Lopes Martins (Por)
Italy: Buffon - Barzagli (Rugani 46), Bonucci, Chiellini, Zappacosta, Parolo, Gagliardini (Cristante 75), Darmian, Verdi (Bernardeschi 64), Immobile, Insigne.
Macedonia: Dimitrievski - Ristovski, Musliu, D Velkoski (Zajkov 75), Radeski, Spirovski, Bardhi, Alioski, Pandev (Trickovski 80), Nestorovski, Hasani (Trajkovski 64).

Oct 6 - Vaduz
Liechtenstein 0
Israel 1 (Tibi 21)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 3,498. **Ref:** Hunter (NI)
Liechtenstein: Jehle - S Wolfinger, Malin (Ospelt 89), Kaufmann (Brandle 51), Goppel, N Hasler, Polverino, Martin Buchel, Marcel Buchel, Burgmeier, Erne (Yildiz 72).
Israel: Harush - Keltjens, Tibi, Tal Ben Haim/D, Davidzada, Natcho, Melikson (Benayoun 78), Kabha, Refaelov (Einbinder 63), Hemed, Atar (Tal Ben Haim/F 70).

Oct 6 - Alicante
Spain 3 (Rodrigo 16, Isco 24, Thiago 27)
Albania 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 25,397. **Ref:** Eskov (Rus)
Spain: De Gea - Sergio Ramos, Pique (Nacho 60), Jordi Alba, Odriozola, Thiago, Saul, Koke, Isco, Silva (Marco Asensio 74), Rodrigo (Aduriz 82).
Albania: Berisha - Hysaj, Veseli, Ajeti, Memolla (Agolli 46), Kace, Memushaj, Grezda (Latifi 66), Xhaka, Llullaku, Balliu (Sadiku 46).

Oct 9 - Shkoder
Albania 0
Italy 1 (Candreva 73)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 16,000. **Ref:** Moen (Nor)
Albania: Berisha - Hysaj, Veseli, Mavraj, Agolli, M Basha (Lila 68), Kace, Roshi (Ahmedi 90+1), Memushaj (Latifi 76), Grezda, Sadiku.
Italy: Buffon - Darmian (Zappacosta 61), Bonucci, Chiellini, Spinazzola, Candreva, Parolo, Gagliardini, Insigne (El Shaarawy 90+3), Immobile, Eder (Gabbiadini 89).

Oct 9 - Jerusalem
Israel 0
Spain 1 (Illarramendi 76)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Thomson (Sco)
Israel: Harush - Keltjens, Tibi, Tal Ben Haim/D, Davidzada, Natcho, Cohen, Kabha (Bitton 67), Atar (Benayoun 74), Hemed, Melikson (Tal Ben Haim/F 55).
Spain: Reina - Azpilicueta, Nacho, Sergio Ramos (Iago Aspas 46), Monreal, Illarramendi, Busquets, Jonathan Viera, Marco Asensio, Pedro (Callejon 76), Aduriz (Isco 66).

Oct 9 - Strumica
Macedonia 4 (Musliu 36, Trajkovski 38, Bardhi 67, Ademi 69)
Liechtenstein 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Kopriwa (Lux)
Macedonia: Dimitrievski - Ristovski, Musliu, Zajkov, Ristevski, Alioski, Bardhi (Doriev 77), Hasani (Elmas 46), Trajkovski, Pandev (Ademi 64), Nestorovski.
Liechtenstein: Jehle - Quintans, Malin, Kaufmann, Goppel, Polverino, S Wolfinger (Yildiz 66), Martin Buchel (M Sele 79), Wieser, Brandle (Erne 73), A Sele.

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP G – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain (QF)	10	9	1	0	36	3	28
Italy (QPO)	10	7	2	1	21	8	23
Albania	10	4	1	5	10	13	13
Israel	10	4	0	6	10	15	12
Macedonia	10	3	2	5	15	15	11
Liechtenstein	10	0	0	10	1	39	0

Group H

Oct 7 - Sarajevo
Bosnia-Herzegovina 3 (Medunjanin 30, Visca 39, Dumic 82)
Belgium 4 (Meunier 4, Batshuayi 59, Vertonghen 68, Carrasco 84)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 9,657. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Begovic - O Vranjes, Dumic, Sunjic, Kolasinac, Besic (Jajalo 62), Lulic, Visca (I Hajrovic 71), Medunjanin (Ibisevic 74), Duljevic, Dzeko.
Belgium: Courtois - Alderweireld, Vermaelen, Vertonghen, De Bruyne, Fellaini (Dendoncker 29), Meunier, Mertens (Tielemans 46), E Hazard, Carrasco (Chadli 86), Batshuayi.

Oct 7 - Nicosia
Cyprus 1 (Sotiriou 18)
Greece 2 (Mitroglou 24, Tziolis 26)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 7,222. **Ref:** Undiano Mallenco (Spa)
Cyprus: Panayi - J Demetriou, Katelaris, Laifis, Antoniades (Alexandrou 60), Artymatas, Laban, C Kyriakou, Kastanos (Economides 79), Margaca (Mytidis 86), Sotiriou.
Greece: Karnezis - Torosidis (Retsos 69), Manolas, Papastathopoulos, Tzavellas, Mantalos, Zeca, Tziolis, Stafylidis, Fortounis (Donis 75), Mitroglou (Samaris 89).

Oct 7 - Faro-Loule, Portugal
Gibraltar 0
Estonia 6 (Luts 10, Kait 30, Zenjov 38, Tamm 52, 65, 77)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 750. **Ref:** Jovic (Cro)
Gibraltar: Ibrahim - Garcia, R Chipolina, Pusey, Barnett, Walker, Mascarenhas-Olivero, Bosio (Lopez 46), Bardon, Anthony Hernandez, Coombes (Yome 73).
Estonia: Aksalu - Jaager, Mets, Klavan, Teniste, Kait, Vassiljev (Antonov 20), Pikk, Zenjov (Henri Anier 58), Tamm, Luts (Mosnikov 66).

Oct10 - Brussels
Belgium 4 (E Hazard 12, pen 63, T Hazard 52, R Lukaku 78)
Cyprus 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Banti (Ita)
Belgium: Courtois - Alderweireld, Ciman, Vertonghen, Meunier (R Lukaku 66), Tielemans, Witsel, Chadli, T Hazard, Batshuayi (Mertens 56), E Hazard (De Bruyne 77).
Cyprus: Panayi - J Demetriou, Katelaris, Laifis, Margaca, C Kyriakou (Charalambides 64), Artymatas (Nikolaou 90+1), Merkis, Laban, Alexandrou (Kastanos 46), Sotiriou.

Oct10 - Tallinn
Estonia 1 (Antonov 75)
Bosnia-Herzegovina 2 (I Hajrovic 48, 84)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bezborodov (Rus)
Estonia: Aksalu - Baranov, Mets, Klavan, Teniste, Kait, Antonov, Pikk, Zenjov (Tamm 69), Henri Anier (Jaager 76), Luts.
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Begovic - M Susic, Cocalic, Zukanovic, Kolasinac (Dumic 46), Krunic, Cimirot, I Hajrovic, Medunjanin, Ibisevic (Dzeko 66), Kodro (Duljevic 75).

Oct10 - Piraeus
Greece 4 (Torosidis 32, Mitroglou 61, 63, Gianniotas 78)
Gibraltar 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Kruashvili (Geo)
Greece: Karnezis - Torosidis (Maniatis 68), Papastathopoulos (Tziolis 68), K Papadopoulos, Stafylidis, Zeca, Tachtsidis, Christodoulopoulos (Gianniotas 74), Mantalos, Fortounis, Mitroglou.
Gibraltar: Ibrahim - Garcia, R Chipolina, Barnett, Mascarenhas-Olivero, Anthony Hernandez, Walker, Bardon, Pons (Guiling 72), Coombes (Ruiz 88), Lopez (Yome 62).

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP H – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Belgium (QF)	10	9	1	0	43	6	28
Greece (QPO)	10	5	4	1	17	6	19
Bosnia-Herz	10	5	2	3	24	13	17
Estonia	10	3	2	5	13	19	11
Cyprus	10	3	1	6	9	18	10
Gibraltar	10	0	0	10	3	47	0

Group I

Oct 6 - Rijeka
Croatia 1 (Mandzukic 57)
Finland 1 (Soiri 90)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 7,578. **Ref:** Stefanski (Pol)
Croatia: Subasic - Vrsaljko, Mitrovic, Vida, Pivaric, Modric, Rakitic, Brozovic (Rog 54), Kramaric (Cop 81), Perisic, Mandzukic (Pasalic 85).
Finland: Hradecky - Arajuuri, N Moisander, J Ojala, Granlund, Schuller (Pukki 69), Sparv, P Hetemaj (Soiri 80), Hamalainen, Pohjanpalo, Skrabb.

Oct 6 - Shkoder, Albania
Kosovo 0
Ukraine 2 (Paqarada og 60, Yarmolenko 87)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 1,261. **Ref:** Pawson (Eng)
Kosovo: Ujkani - Vojvoda, Rrahmani, Jashanica, Paqarada, Musolli (F Kastrati 83), Kryeziu (Rashani 53), Rashica, Halimi, Celina, Muriqi (Nuhiu 70).
Ukraine: Pyatov - Karavaev, Khacheridi, Ordets, Matviyenko, Rotan (Stepanenko 63), Sydorchuk, Yarmolenko, Harmash, Konoplyanka (Buyalskyi 88), Kravets (Marlos 46).

Oct 6 - Eskisehir
Turkey 0
Iceland 3 (J Gudmundsson 32, B Bjarnason 39, Arnason 50)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 30,390. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)
Turkey: Volkan Babacan - Ayhan, Mehmet Topal, Caglar, Caner, Sahin (Ozan 46), Emre Belozoglu (Malli 78), Tosun, Ozyakup, Arda (Mor 60), Burak.
Iceland: Halldorsson - B Saevarsson, Arnason, R Sigurdsson, Magnusson, J Gudmundsson (A Skulason 82), A Gunnarsson (Ingason 65), G Sigurdsson, B Bjarnason, J Bodvarsson, A Finnbogason (O Skulason 78).

Oct 9 - Turku
Finland 2 (Arajuuri 76, Pohjanpalo 88)
Turkey 2 (Tosun 57, 83)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bastien (Fra)
Finland: Hradecky - Pirinen, Arajuuri, Sauli Vaisanen, N Moisander, Lod, Lam (Markkanen 86), Schuller, P Hetemaj (Hamalainen 60), Pukki (Soiri 82), Pohjanpalo.
Turkey: Volkan Babacan - Ozan, Toprak, Caglar, Ismail, Yusuf (Mor 75), Selcuk Inan (Mehmet Topal 85), Ozyakup, Okay, Calhanoglu, Tosun.

Oct 9 - Reykjavik
Iceland 2 (G Sigurdsson 40, J Gudmundsson 68)
Kosovo 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Lechner (Aut)
Iceland: Halldorsson - B Saevarsson, R Sigurdsson, Arnason, Magnusson, J Gudmundsson, Hallfredsson (R Sigurjonsson 89), A Gunnarsson (Ingason 79), B Bjarnason, G Sigurdsson, J Bodvarsson (A Finnbogason 61).
Kosovo: Ujkani - Vojvoda, Jashanica, Rrahmani, Paqarada, Pnishi (Bernard Berisha 54), Halimi (L Kastrati 78), V Berisha, Rashica, Celina, Nuhiu (Muriqi 54).

Oct 9 - Kiev
Ukraine 0
Croatia 2 (Kramaric 62, 70)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Ukraine: Pyatov - Karavaev, Rakitskyi, Khacheridi, Matviyenko, Rotan (Sydorchuk 69), Stepanenko, Yarmolenko, Marlos (Besedin 78), Konoplyanka, Harmash (Kovalenko 66).
Croatia: Subasic - Vida, Lovren, Mitrovic, Vrsaljko (Pivaric 86), Rakitic, Badelj, Kramaric (Pasalic 88), Modric, Perisic, Mandzukic (Rog 90).

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP I – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iceland (QF)	10	7	1	2	16	7	22
Croatia (QPO)	10	6	2	2	15	4	20
Ukraine	10	5	2	3	13	9	17
Turkey	10	4	3	3	14	13	15
Finland	10	2	3	5	9	13	9
Kosovo	10	0	1	9	3	24	1

● *The 9 group winners have qualified for the finals; the 8 runners-up with the best group stage record enter the Europe section play-offs*

Europe section play-offs

● *The 9 group stage runners-up were ranked according to their results against the countries finishing1st, 3rd, 4th & 5th in their respective groups, with the top 8 then being drawn in 4 head-to-head, 2-leg ties*

EUROPE GROUP STAGE RUNNERS-UP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Switzerland	8	7	0	1	18	6	21
Italy	8	5	2	1	12	8	17
Denmark	8	4	2	2	13	6	14
Croatia	8	4	2	2	8	4	14
Sweden	8	4	1	3	18	9	13
N Ireland	8	4	1	3	10	6	13
Greece	8	3	4	1	9	5	13
Rep Ireland	8	3	4	1	7	5	13
Slovakia	*8*	*4*	*0*	*4*	*11*	*6*	*12*

Draw

Croatia v Greece (Nov 9 & Nov 12)
Denmark v Rep of Ireland (Nov 11 & Nov 14)
Northern Ireland v Switzerland (Nov 9 & Nov 12)
Sweden v Italy (Nov 10 & Nov 13)
● *The 4 winners will qualify for the finals*

SOUTH AMERICA section

● 4.5 finals places available

Oct 5 - Buenos Aires
Argentina 0
Peru 0
Att: 47,960. **Ref:** Sampaio (Bra)
Argentina: Romero - Mercado, Otamendi, Mascherano, Acuna, Biglia, Banega (Gago 60; E Perez 66), Di Maria (Rigoni 46), Messi, A Gomez, Benedetto.
Peru: Gallese - Corzo, Araujo, Rodriguez, Trauco, Pena (Cartagena 53), Tapia (Aquino 78), Yotun, Farfan (Polo 70), Guerrero, Flores.

Oct 5 - La Paz
Bolivia 0
Brazil 0
Att: 34,725. **Ref:** Rapallini (Arg)
Bolivia: Lampe - Valverde, Raldes, Gutierrez, Diego Bejarano, Justiniano (Castro 46), Machado, L Morales, Arce (Saucedo 79), Martins Moreno, Fierro (Alvarez 58).
Brazil: Alisson - Daniel Alves, Thiago Silva (Marquinhos 29), Miranda, Alex Sandro, Casemiro, Philippe Coutinho (Willian 66), Paulinho (Fernandinho 83), Renato Augusto, Neymar, Gabriel Jesus.

Oct 5 - Santiago
Chile 2 (Vargas 22, Sanchez 85)
Ecuador 1 (Romario Ibarra 84)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 35,000. **Ref:** Ricci (Bra)
Chile: Bravo - Isla, G Medel, G Jara, Mena, Vidal, Silva (Pulgar 90+2), Hernandez, Valdivia (Gutierrez 83), Vargas (Rodriguez 80), Sanchez.
Ecuador: Banguera - A Valencia, Aimar, Arboleda, Ramirez (Romario Ibarra 82), Renato Ibarra, Intriago (Murillo 76), Orejuela, Preciado (Garces 46), Arroyo, Ordonez.
Sent off: Arroyo 90+4.

Oct 5 - Barranquilla
Colombia 1 (Falcao 80)
Paraguay 2 (O Cardozo 89, Sanabria 90+2)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 45,000. **Ref:** Marques (Bra)
Colombia: Ospina - Arias, C Zapata, D Sanchez, Fabra, C Sanchez, Aguilar (Barrios 86), Cuadrado (Gutierrez 63), Rodriguez, Cardona (Chara 75), Falcao.
Paraguay: A Silva - B Valdez, Gomez, Balbuena, Samudio (O Cardozo 77), Moreira (Sanabria 55), V Caceres (R Piris 38), R Ortiz, O Romero, A Romero, Gonzalez.

Oct 5 - San Cristobal
Venezuela 0
Uruguay 0
Att: 32,100. **Ref:** Daronco (Bra)
Venezuela: Farinez - Garcia, Chancellor, Villanueva, Quijada, Cordova (Soteldo 80), Moreno, Rincon, Murillo (Lucena 83), S Rondon, Martinez (Otero 69).
Uruguay: Muslera - M Pereira, Gimenez, Godin, Caceres, Nandez (A Gonzalez 83), Valverde (De Arrascaeta 79), Vecino, C Rodriguez (Bentancur 65), Cavani, Suarez.

Oct10 - Sao Paulo
Brazil 3 (Paulinho 55, Gabriel Jesus 57, 90+3)
Chile 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 41,008. **Ref:** Zambrano (Ecu)
Brazil: Ederson - Daniel Alves, Marquinhos, Miranda, Alex Sandro, Casemiro, Philippe Coutinho (Roberto Firmino 87), Paulinho, Renato Augusto (Fernandinho 82), Neymar (Willian 85), Gabriel Jesus.
Chile: Bravo - Isla, G Medel, G Jara, Beausejour, Fuenzalida (Puch 63), Aranguiz (Pulgar 46), Hernandez (Paredes 77), Valdivia, Vargas, Sanchez.

Oct10 - Quito
Ecuador 1 (Romario Ibarra 1)
Argentina 3 (Messi 12, 20, 62)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 29,000. **Ref:** Daronco (Bra)
Ecuador: Banguera - Velasco, Aimar, Arboleda, Ramirez, Intriago (Uchuari 77), Renato Ibarra, Orejuela, Cevallos (E Valencia 41), Romario Ibarra, Ordonez (Estrada 64).
Argentina: Romero - Mercado, Mascherano, Otamendi, Salvio (Fazio 90), Biglia, E Perez, Acuna, Messi, Di Maria (Paredes 84), Benedetto (Icardi 76).

Oct10 - Asuncion
Paraguay 0
Venezuela 1 (Herrera 84)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 34,786. **Ref:** Sampaio (Bra)
Paraguay: A Silva - Moreira, Gomez, Da Silva (Samudio 62), Alonso, O Romero, Rojas, R Piris, Dominguez (Bareiro 56), Sanabria (O Cardozo 56), A Romero. *Sent off: Gomez 89.*
Venezuela: Farinez - R Hernandez, Chancellor, Angel, Quijada, Cordova (Soteldo 57), Herrera, Rincon, Murillo (Moreno 81), S Rondon, Martinez (Otero 77). *Sent off: Angel 89.*

Oct10 - Lima
Peru 1 (Ospina og 77)
Colombia 1 (Rodriguez 56)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 29,637. **Ref:** Ricci (Bra)
Peru: Gallese - Corzo, Ramos, Rodriguez (Araujo 46), Trauco, Tapia, Yotun (Ruidiaz 71), Carrillo (Reyna 63), Cueva, Flores, Guerrero.
Colombia: Ospina - Arias, D Sanchez, O Murillo, Fabra, Cuadrado, Aguilar, C Sanchez, Rodriguez (Chara 85), Falcao (G Moreno 90), D Zapata (Barrios 73).

Oct10 - Montevideo
Uruguay 4 (Caceres 39, Cavani 42, Suarez 60, 76)
Bolivia 2 (G Silva og 24, Godin og 79)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 50,000. **Ref:** Marques (Bra)
Uruguay: Muslera - Caceres, Gimenez, Godin, G Silva (M Pereira 77), Valverde (C Rodriguez 60), Vecino, Bentancur, De Arrascaeta (Lodeiro 77), Suarez, Cavani.
Bolivia: Lampe - Diego Bejarano, Valverde, Raldes, Candia, Sagredo, Chumacero (Arce 46), Castro (Justiniano 57), Machado, Campos, Martins Moreno (Alvarez 69).

WC QUALS – SOUTH AMERICA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil (QF)	18	12	5	1	41	11	41
Uruguay (QF)	18	9	4	5	32	20	31
Argentina (QF)	18	7	7	4	19	16	28
Colombia (QF)	18	7	6	5	21	19	27
Peru (QPO)	18	7	5	6	27	26	26
Chile	18	8	2	8	26	27	26
Paraguay	18	7	3	8	19	25	24
Ecuador	18	6	2	10	26	29	20
Bolivia	18	4	2	12	16	38	14
Venezuela	18	2	6	10	19	35	12

● *The top 4 have qualified for the finals; the 5th-placed country, Peru, will meet New Zealand, the winner of the Oceania section play-off, in a 2-leg play-off (see Intercontinental Play-offs) for a place in the finals*

AFRICA section

● 5 finals places available

3rd round

Group A

Oct 7 - Conakry
Guinea 1 (N Keita 36)
Tunisia 4 (Msakni 45+3, 74, 90+6, Ben Amor 83)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Sikazwe (Zam)
Guinea: A Keita - O Balde, Sankoh, Ibrahima Conte/D, Issiaga Sylla, S Diallo (Lamah 85), N Keita, Ibrahima Conte/M, S Soumah, D Camara (S Kaba 78), Idrissa Sylla (Sankhon 65). *Sent off: N Keita 90+4.*
Tunisia: A Mathlouthi - Nagguez, Bedoui, Meriah, Maaloul, F Ben Youssef (Badri 59), Ben Amor, Sassi (Trabelsi 76), Chaalali, Msakni, Khenissi (Khazri 78).

Oct 7 - Monastir, Tunisia
Libya 1 (Almoatasembellah 69)
DR Congo 2 (Bakambu 50, Mubele 75)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Diedhiou (Sen)
Libya: Azzaqa - Al Maghasi, Al Gamal, Abboud, Sabbou (Madyen 55; Shafshuf 87), Al Tarhouni, Ahmed, Al Lafi, Almoatasembellah, Elhouni, Zuway (Ghanudi 74).
DR Congo: Matampi - Mpeko, Moke Abro, Tisserand, Ngonda, Mbemba, Mabidi, Botaka (Kabananga 64), Kebano (Bolingi 72), Mubele, Bakambu (Luyindama 83).

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tunisia	5	4	1	0	11	4	13
DR Congo	5	3	1	1	11	6	10
Guinea	5	1	0	4	5	11	3
Libya	5	1	0	4	4	10	3

Remaining games
Nov 11: DR Congo v Guinea; Tunisia v Libya.

Group B

Oct 7 - Yaounde
Cameroon 2 (N'Jie 25, Pangop 88)
Algeria 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Essrayri (Tun)
Cameroon: Ondoa - Fai, Ngadeu, Teikeu, Leuko, Olinga (Ngamaleu 82), Siani, Zambo Anguissa, Aboubakar, Bassogog (Mandjeck 72), N'Jie (Pangop 87).
Algeria: M'Bolhi - Cadamuro, Mandi, Bensebaini (Ferhat 71), Fares, Benguit, Taider (Bennacer 60), Feghouli (Ghezzal 75), Soudani, Hanni, Belfodil.

Oct 7 - Uyo
Nigeria 1 (Iwobi 73)
Zambia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bondo (Bot)
Nigeria: Ezenwa - Shehu, Troost-Ekong, Balogun, Echiejile (Aina 80), Ndidi, Onazi (Agu 30), Moses, Mikel, Simon (Iwobi 66), Ighalo.
Zambia: Mweene - Silwimba, Sunzu, Z Tembo, Kapumbu, A Mulenga (Ching'andu 87), Mtonga, Lungu (Mbewe 51), Sakala (Shonga 78), Ngonga, Mwepu.

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria (QF)	5	4	1	0	11	3	13
Zambia	5	2	1	2	6	5	7
Cameroon	5	1	3	1	5	7	6
Algeria	5	0	1	4	3	10	1

Remaining games
Nov 10: Algeria v Nigeria.
Nov 11: Zambia v Cameroon.

Group C

Oct 6 - Bamako
Mali 0
Ivory Coast 0
Ref: Martins de Carvalho (Ang)
Mali: D Diarra - H Traore, Wague, Fofana, Y Kone, A Traore (Djenepo 40), S Diarra, Samassekou, Bissouma (Haidara 80), M Doumbia, Niane (K Coulibaly 63).
Ivory Coast: Gbohouo - Aurier, Bailly, Kanon, Konan, Serey Die (Sanogo 46), Kessie, Assale (Kalou 67), Gbamin, Cornet, Kodjia.

Oct 7 - Casablanca
Morocco 3 (Boutaib 38, 56, 72)
Gabon 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Gomes (SAf)
Morocco: El Kajoui - Dirar, Benatia (Banoune 81), Saiss, Hakimi, El Ahmadi, Boussoufa, Amrabat (Harit 90), Belhanda, Ziyech, Boutaib (Bouhaddouz 81).
Gabon: Bitseki Moto - Wachter, Appindangoye, Ecuele Manga, Nzambe, Bouanga (Nzembi 85), Tandjigora (Assoumou Akue 18), D Ndong, Lemina, Aubameyang, Meye (Ameka Autchanga 59).

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco	5	2	3	0	9	0	9
Ivory Coast	5	2	2	1	7	3	8
Gabon	5	1	2	2	2	7	5
Mali	5	0	3	2	1	9	3

Remaining games
Nov 11: Gabon v Mali; Ivory Coast v Morocco.

Group D

Oct 7 - Praia
Cape Verde Islands 0
Senegal 2 (Sakho 82, C N'Doye 90+3)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Grisha (Egy)
Cape Verde Islands: Vozinha - Tiago Almeida, Fernando Varela, Steven Pereira, Stopira, Marco Soares (Kevin Oliveira 85), Ponck, Babanco, Ryan Mendes, Heldon (Nuno Rocha 66), Garry Rodrigues (Ricardo Gomes 78).
Senegal: K N'Diaye - Wague, Mbodj, K Koulibaly, A Mbengue, Gueye, Kouyate, P A N'Diaye (Niang 63), S Mane (C N'Doye 89), Sakho, Keita (Nguette 80).

Oct 7 - Johannesburg
South Africa 3 (Tau 1, Zwane 34, S Vilakazi 45+1)
Burkina Faso 1 (Alain Traore 87)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Alioum (Cam)
South Africa: Khune - Mkhize, Gould, Daniels, Hlanti, Zwane, Zungu, Mokotjo, S Vilakazi (Manyama 82), Jali (Kekana 71), Tau (Ndlovu 86). *Sent off: Zungu 67.*
Burkina Faso: Koffi - Malo, B Kone, Yago, M Ouattara (Diawara 76), B Toure (Ki 69), C Kabore, B Traore, Alain Traore, Bayala (Bance 33), Nakoulma.

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal	4	2	2	0	6	2	8
Burkina Faso	5	1	3	1	6	6	6
Cape Verde Is	5	2	0	3	4	8	6
South Africa	4	1	1	2	6	6	4

FIFA has ordered the South Africa v Senegal tie, originally played in November last year, to be replayed this month because the referee, Joseph Lamptey of Ghana, 'manipulated' the outcome, a 2-1 win for South Africa. That result has been expunged from the table shown here. The decision to restage the game is subject to appeal

Remaining games
Nov 10: South Africa v Senegal.
Nov 14: Burkina Faso v Cape Verde Islands; Senegal v South Africa.

Group E

Oct 7 - Kampala
Uganda 0
Ghana 0
Ref: Bennett (SAf)
Uganda: Onyango - Wadada, Wasswa, Isinde, Walusimbi, Okwi, Iguma, Mawejje, Luwagga (Ochaya 73), Miya (Mutyaba 62), Nsibambi (Sserunkuma 67).
Ghana: R Ofori - Opare, Opoku, Amartey, Agbenyenu, Sarfo (Twumasi 51), Duncan (Dwamena 56), E Ofori, Acheampong (Attamah 86), Partey, Boakye.

Oct 8 - Borg El Arab
Egypt 2 (M Salah 63, pen 90+5)
Congo 1 (Bouka Moutou 88)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Gassama (Gam)
Egypt: El Hadary - A Fathy, Rabia, Hegazy, Abdel-Shafy, Elneny, Hamed, M Salah, S Gomaa (Trezeguet 56), Sobhi (Elmohamady 88), Koka (Gamal 78).
Congo: Mouko - Etou-Thomaso, Mayembo, Itoua, Badila, Delarge (Bouka Moutou 72), Oniangue, N'Dinga, Bahamboula (Ndockyt 84), Bifouma, Saint-Louis (Gandze 90+3).

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt (QF)	5	4	0	1	7	3	12
Uganda	5	2	2	1	2	1	8
Ghana	5	1	3	1	6	4	6
Congo	5	0	1	4	4	11	1

Remaining games
Nov 12: Congo v Uganda; Ghana v Egypt.

● *The 5 group winners will qualify for the finals*

CONCACAF section

● 3.5 finals places available

5th round

Oct 6 - San Jose
Costa Rica 1 (Waston 90+5)
Honduras 1 (Hernandez 67)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 24,948. **Ref:** Ramos (Mex)
Costa Rica: Navas - Gamboa, Gonzalez, Acosta (Wallace 78), Waston, Oviedo, B Ruiz, Borges, Guzman, Bolanos (Colindres 72), Urena (Venegas 72).
Honduras: Escober - Beckeles, Johnny Palacios, M Figueroa, Izaguirre, Acosta, A Mejia, Elis (Castillo 90), A Lopez (Pena 83), Quioto, Hernandez.

Oct 6 - San Luis Potosi
Mexico 3 (Lozano 78, J Hernandez 88, H Herrera 90+4)
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (S Winchester 66)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 25,111. **Ref:** Ward (SKN)
Mexico: J J Corona - Salcedo, D Reyes (Peralta 70), Moreno, Layun, G Dos Santos (Vela 61), H Herrera, Guardado, Aquino (Lozano 56), J Hernandez, J M Corona.
Trinidad & Tobago: Foncette - Moses, Cyrus, Gonzales, Villaroel, K George, N Lewis, Paul (Molino 61), Hyland, L Garcia (J Jones 73), S Winchester (Caesar 86).

Oct 6 - Orlando
United States 4 (Pulisic 8, Altidore 19, pen 43, Wood 63)
Panama 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 25,303. **Ref:** Garcia (Mex)
United States: Howard - Yedlin, O Gonzalez, Besler, Villafana, Arriola, Bradley, Nagbe (Bedoya 79), Pulisic (McCarty 57), Altidore (Dempsey 71), Wood.
Panama: Penedo - M A Murillo, R Torres, Baloy (Escobar 46), Ovalle, Quintero, Godoy, G Gomez, Barcenas (Cooper 26), B Perez (Arroyo 60), G Torres.

Oct10 - San Pedro Sula
Honduras 3 (Elis 34, Ochoa og 54, Quioto 60)
Mexico 2 (Peralta 17, Vela 39)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 37,000. **Ref:** Aguilar (ESv)
Honduras: Escober - Beckeles, H Figueroa, M Figueroa, Claros (Acosta 69), Alvarado, A Mejia, Elis, A Lopez (Johnny Palacios 88), Quioto, Hernandez.
Mexico: Ochoa - Araujo, Ayala, Alanis (J M Corona 67), Gallardo, Layun, J Dos Santos (Alvarez 46), H Herrera, Vela (Guardado 59), Peralta, R Jimenez.

Oct10 - Panama City
Panama 2 (B Perez 53, R Torres 88)
Costa Rica 1 (Venegas 37)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 26,503. **Ref:** Lopez (Gtm)
Panama: Penedo - Machado, R Torres, Escobar, Ovalle, Barcenas (Tejada 51), G Gomez (Cooper 60), Godoy, Quintero, B Perez, G Torres (Arroyo 78).
Costa Rica: Pemberton - Salvatierra, Gutierrez, Umana, Calvo, Matarrita (Gonzalez 75), Wallace, Guzman (Azofeifa 63), Borges, B Ruiz (Urena 69), Venegas.

Oct10 - Couva
Trinidad & Tobago 2 (O Gonzalez og 17, A Jones 37)
United States 1 (Pulisic 47)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Mejia (ESv)
Trinidad & Tobago: Foncette - A Jones, Cyrus, Gonzales, Hodge (Villaroel 82), N Lewis, Paul, K George, Hyland, L Garcia (J Jones 72), S Winchester (Caesar 78).
United States: Howard - Yedlin, O Gonzalez, Besler, Villafana (Acosta 72), Arriola (Dempsey 46), Bradley, Nagbe (Feilhaber 84), Pulisic, Altidore, Wood.

WC QUALS – CONCACAF – 5TH RND – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico (QF)	10	6	3	1	16	7	21
Costa Rica (QF)	10	4	4	2	14	8	16
Panama (QF)	10	3	4	3	9	10	13
H'duras (QPO)	10	3	4	3	13	19	13
United States	10	3	3	4	17	13	12
Trinidad & Tob	10	2	0	8	7	19	6

● *The top 3 have qualified for the finals; the 4th-placed country, Honduras, will meet Australia, the winner of the Asia section play-off, in a 2-leg play-off (see Intercontinental Play-offs) for a place in the finals*

ASIA section

● 4.5 finals places available

3rd round

WC QUALS – ASIA – 3RD RND: GP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran (QF)	10	6	4	0	10	2	22
Sth Korea (QF)	10	4	3	3	11	10	15
Syria (QPO)	10	3	4	3	9	8	13
Uzbekistan	10	4	1	5	6	7	13
China	10	3	3	4	8	10	12
Qatar	10	2	1	7	8	15	7

WC QUALS – ASIA – 3RD RND: GP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan (QF)	10	6	2	2	17	7	20
S Arabia (QF)	10	6	1	3	17	10	19
Australia (QPO)	10	5	4	1	16	11	19
UAE	10	4	1	5	10	13	13
Iraq	10	3	2	5	11	12	11
Thailand	10	0	2	8	6	24	2

● *The top 2 in both groups have qualified for the finals; the 2 3rd-placed countries went into the Asia section play-off*

Asia section play-off

1st leg

Oct 5 - Krubong, Malaysia
Syria 1 (Al Somah pen 85)
Australia 1 (Kruse 40)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 2,150. **Ref:** Faghani (Irn)
Syria: Alma - F Youssef, Hadi Al Masri, Z Midani, Ajan, Al Mawas (Al Khatib 76), Mobayed, Haj Mohamad, Kalfa (Al Jafal 46), Al Somah, Khribin (Mardikian 80).
Australia: Ryan - Degenek, Sainsbury, Jurman, Milligan, Mooy, Risdon (Rukavytsya 63), Leckie, Kruse (Luongo 70), Behich, Juric (Rogic 83).

2nd leg

Oct10 - Sydney
Australia 2 (Cahill 13, 109)
Syria 1 (Al Somah 6)
Aet. **HT:** 1-1. **90mins:** 1-1. **Att:** 42,136.
Ref: Irmatov (Uzb)
Australia 3-2 on agg
Australia: Ryan - Degenek, Sainsbury, Jurman, Leckie, Troisi (Rukavytsya 73), Milligan, Kruse, Smith (Mooy 11), Rogic (Juric 96), Cahill.
Syria: Alma - F Youssef, Al Baour, Z Midani, Ajan, Mido (Hamwiah 75), Haj Mohamad, Al Mawas, Mardikian (Omari 90+1), Al Jafal (Al Khatib 61), Al Somah. *Sent off: Al Mawas 94.*

● *As winners, Australia will meet Honduras, the 4th-placed CONCACAF country, in a 2-leg play-off (see Intercontinental Play-offs) for a place in the finals*

OCEANIA section

● 0.5 finals places available

Oceania section play-off

1st leg - Sep1; 2nd leg - Sep 5
New Zealand v Solomon Islands
6-1, 2-2 (agg 8-3)

● *As winners, New Zealand will meet Peru, the 5th-placed South American country, in a 2-leg play-off (see Intercontinental Play-offs) for a place in the finals*

INTERCONTINENTAL PLAY-OFFS

Honduras v Australia (*Nov10 & Nov15*)
New Zealand v Peru (*Nov11 & Nov15*)

● *The 2 winners will qualify for the finals*

2019 ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

3rd round

Group A

Oct10 - Yangon
Myanmar 2 (Aung Thu 52, Kyaw Ko Ko 90+2)
Kyrgyzstan 2 (Zemlianukhin pen 12, Maier 49)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 2,886. **Ref:** Abdulnabi (Bhn)

Oct11 - Bangalore
India 4 (Borges 28, Chhetri 60, Lam Ka Seng og 70, Lalpekhlua 90+2)
Macau 1 (Torrao 37)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 4,113. **Ref:** Abdul Baki (Oma)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
India (QF)	4	4	0	0	8	1	12
Kyrgyzstan	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Myanmar	3	1	1	1	6	3	4
Macau	4	0	0	4	1	11	0

Group B

Oct10 - Hong Kong
Hong Kong 2 (Tarres 44, McKee 49)
Malaysia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 7,920. **Ref:** Gamini (Sri)
Sent off: Safiq (Malaysia) 40

Oct10 - Beirut
Lebanon 5 (El Helwe 21, Maatouk 25, Ayass 50, Hamam 79, Ataya 90+1)
North Korea 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Tojo (Jap)
Sent off: Kim Chol-bom (North Korea) 82

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lebanon	4	3	1	0	11	3	10
Hong Kong	4	1	2	1	4	4	5
North Korea	3	0	2	1	3	8	2
Malaysia	3	0	1	2	2	5	1

Group C

Oct10 - Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Afghanistan 3 (Al Souliman og 15, Fakhrudin 64, Amani 80)
Jordan 3 (Abu Amarah 40, Al Saify pen 43, Al Souliman 86)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 1,500. **Ref:** Tufayelieh (Syr)

Oct10 - Hanoi
Vietnam 5 (Dinh Thanh Trung 13, Nguyen Van Quyet 56, Nguyen Anh Duc 60, Nguyen Cong Phuong 76, Mac Hong Quan 90+2)
Cambodia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 11,000. **Ref:** Pu-Udom (Tha)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jordan	4	2	2	0	14	4	8
Vietnam	4	2	2	0	8	2	8
Cambodia	4	1	0	3	2	14	3
Afghanistan	4	0	2	2	5	9	2

Group D

Oct10 - Male
Maldives 1 (Fasir 24)
Oman 3 (Al Hajri 14, Amdhan Ali og 18, Mubarak 57)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 2,884. **Ref:** Gillett (Aus)

Oct10 - Hebron
Palestine 10 (Bahdari 3, 39, 43, Jaber 5, Seyam 21, Maraaba 28, Salem pen 48, Natour 60, Cantillana 63, 70)
Bhutan 0
HT: 6-0. **Att:** 7,250. **Ref:** Arumughan (Ind)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palestine (QF)	4	4	0	0	17	1	12
Oman (QF)	4	3	0	1	23	3	9
Maldives	4	1	0	3	3	11	3
Bhutan	4	0	0	4	0	28	0

Group E

Oct10 - Taipei
Taiwan 2 (Chen Po-liang 89, Chu En-le 90+1)
Bahrain 1 (Abdul-Latif pen 18)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 7,908. **Ref:** Kimura (Jap)

Oct10 - Ashgabat
Turkmenistan 2 (Orazsahedov 18, 90+3)
Singapore 1 (Irfan 27)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 15,400. **Ref:** Ng (HK)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bahrain	4	2	1	1	8	3	7
Turkmenistan	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Taiwan	4	2	0	2	5	10	6
Singapore	4	0	2	2	3	5	2

Group F

Oct10 - Hisor
Tajikistan 3 (Davronov pen 20, Umarbayev pen 60, M Dzhalilov pen 87)
Nepal 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 12,000. **Ref:** Bonyadifard (Irn)

Oct10 - Al Wakrah, Qatar
Yemen 1 (Ali 63)
Philippines 1 (Mike Ott 89)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,169. **Ref:** Wang (Chn)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Philippines	4	2	2	0	11	7	8
Yemen	4	1	3	0	5	4	6
Tajikistan	4	2	0	2	9	7	6
Nepal	4	0	1	3	2	9	1

● *A total of 6 rounds of games will be played*

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 24-team finals.12 other countries have already qualified – Australia, China, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Syria, Thailand, UAE (hosts) & Uzbekistan*

FRIENDLIES

Saturday, September 30

Sep 30 - Gaborone
Botswana 2 (Ramatlhakwane pens x2)
Ethiopia 0
HT: 1-0

Monday, October 2

Oct 2 - Taipa
Macau 3 (Carlinhos Leonel 66, 74, Torrao 83)
Laos 1 (Carlinhos Leonel og 57)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Gamini (Sri)

Wednesday, October 4

Oct 4 - Dubai, UAE
Jordan 1 (Khattab 38)
Oman 1 (tbc 89)
HT: 1-0

Thursday, October 5

Oct 5 - Hong Kong
Hong Kong 4 (Tarres 10, Wong Wai 13, Karikari 73, Sandro pen 83)
Laos 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 2,029

Oct 5 - Tehran
Iran 2 (Ansarifard 51, 60)
Togo 0
HT: 0-0
Iran: Lak - Ghafouri, Kanaani (Hosseini 75), Cheshmi, Hajsafi (Aghaei 46), Ghoddos (Ghoochannejhad 63), Abdollahzadeh (Amiri 75), Ezatolahi (Ebrahimi 46), Torabi (Imani 46), Rezaei, Ansarifard.

Oct 5 - Basra
Iraq 2 (Nouri pen 18, Ibrahim 45+2)
Kenya 1 (Olunga 85)
HT: 2-0

Oct 5 - Mandalay
Myanmar 1 (Aung Thu 50)
Thailand 3 (Mongkol 12, Teerasil 32, Thitipan pen 78)
HT: 0-2

Oct 5 - Doha
Qatar 3 (Almoez Ali 39, 52, Ahmed Alaa pen 81)
Singapore 1 (Faris 53)
HT: 1-0

Oct 5 - Taipei
Taiwan 4 (Chen Hao-wei 41, Chen Po-liang 52, pen 56, Jiang Sin-long 86)
Mongolia 2 (Tsagaantsooj Munkh-Erdene 4, Nyam-Osor 75)
HT: 1-1

Friday, October 6

Oct 6 - Toyota
Japan 2 (Osako pen 50, Kurata 87)
New Zealand 1 (Wood 59)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 38,461. **Ref:** Liu (HK)
Japan: Kawashima - Nagatomo, H Sakai, Makino, Yoshida, Ideguchi (Kurata 82), Kagawa (Kobayashi 60), Yamaguchi (Endo 90+3), Muto (Inui 70), Kubo (Asano 78), Osako (Sugimoto 60).
New Zealand: Marinovic - Reid, Boxall, Ingham, Colvey (Doyle 66), Durante, McGlinchey (Tuiloma 82), Thomas, Barbarouses (Smeltz 71), Wood, Rojas (Tzimopoulos 75).

Oct 6 - Tunis, Tunisia
Mauritania 0
Comoros 1 (M'Changama 83)
HT: 0-0

Saturday, October 7

Oct 7 - Moscow
Russia 4 (Smolov 44, Kim Joo-young og 55, og 57, Aleksey Miranchuk 83)
South Korea 2 (Kwon Kyung-won 87, Ji Dong-won 90+3)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 24,200. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
Russia: Akinfeev - Kudryashov, Dzhikiya, Vasin, Erokhin (Aleksey Miranchuk 74), Samedov (Mario Fernandes 64), Anton Miranchuk (Tarasov 46), Kuzyaev (Ozdoev 75), Zhirkov (Raush 63), Kokorin, Smolov (Zabolotniy 80).

South Korea: Kim Seung-gyu - Kim Young-gwon (Oh Jae-suk 64), Kim Joo-young, Koo Ja-cheol (Park Jong-woo 70), Kwon Kyung-won, Kwon Chang-hoon (Hwang Il-su 79), Son Heung-min (Nam Tae-hee 79), Lee Chung-yong, Jang Hyun-soo, Jung Woo-young (Ki Sung-yueng 63), Hwang Ui-jo (Ji Dong-won 64).

Oct 7 - Dar Es Salaam
Tanzania 1 (Msuva 58)
Malawi 1 (Ng'ambi 35)
HT: 0-1
Sent off: Nyoni 86, Yassin 90+3 (both Tanzania)

Sunday, October 8
Oct 8 - Houston, USA
El Salvador 1 (Pineda 75)
Canada 0
HT: 0-0
El Salvador: Carrillo - Larin, Mancia, Dominguez, Tamacas (Espinoza 90+5), Jaime Alas (Corea 61), Menjivar (Renderos 85), Alvarez (Cerritos 89), Pineda (Garcia 79), E Burgos, N Bonilla (Herrera 72).
Canada: Thomas - Jakovic, Vitoria, Petrasso, Piette, Kaye, Arfield, Osorio (Aleman 53), Larin (Jackson-Hamel 52), Aird (Cordova 62), Edwards (Twardek 83).

Oct 8 - Pak Kret
Thailand 1 (Teerasil 62)
Kenya 0
HT: 0-0

Monday, October 9
Oct 9 - Malabo
Equatorial Guinea 3 (Nsue 12, 85, Sisinio 45)
Mauritius 1 (Nabab 30)
HT: 2-1

Tuesday, October 10
Oct10 - Mallemort, France
Gabon 0
Benin 1 (Pote 36)
HT: 0-1

Oct10 - Yokohama
Japan 3 (Kurata 7, Sugimoto 17, Kagawa 90+2)
Haiti 3 (Lafrance 28, Nazon 53, 78)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 47,420. **Ref:** Green (Aus)
Japan: Higashiguchi - Shoji, Nagatomo (Kurumaya 46), Makino, G Sakai, Endo, Kurata (Kagawa 59), Kobayashi (Ideguchi 56), Sugimoto (Osako 64), Inui (Muto 80), Asano (Haraguchi 46).
Haiti: Placide - Arcus (Pompee 82), Jerome, Geffrard (Ambrose 64), Christian, Herivaux, Lafrance (Metelus 68), Guerrier (Sprangers 86), Etienne (Jean-Baptiste 45+1), Sanon (Desire 59), Nazon.

Oct10 - Doha
Qatar 1 (Al Haidos 28)
Curacao 2 (Bacuna 35, E Hooi 70)
HT: 1-1

Oct10 - Kazan
Russia 1 (Poloz 74)
Iran 1 (Azmoun 57)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 33,370. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)
Russia: Lunev - Kudryashov, Vasin (Dzhikiya 46), Raush, Mario Fernandes (Samedov 66), Kutepov, Tarasov (Kuzyaev 64), Erokhin, Aleksey Miranchuk (Poloz 56), Smolov (Zabolotniy 83), Kokorin.
Iran: Beiranvand - Ghafouri (Rezaeian 83), Hosseini, Ebrahimi (Abdollahzadeh 90), Pouraliganji, Amiri, Ezatolahi (Cheshmi 80), Hajsafi, Azmoun (Rezaei 64), Jahanbakhsh (Ghoddos 64), Taremi (Imani 75).

Oct10 - Jeddah
Saudi Arabia 0
Ghana 3 (Nuhu 44, Os. Hawsawi og 69, Partey 90)
HT: 0-1

Oct10 - Bienne, Switzerland
South Korea 1 (Son Heung-min pen 66)
Morocco 3 (Tannane 7, 10, El Haddad 46)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 2,550. **Ref:** Bieri (Swi)
South Korea: Kim Jin-hyeon - Kim Kee-hee (Jung Woo-young 28), Song Ju-hun, Rim Chang-woo, Jang Hyun-soo, Ki Sung-yueng (Park Jong-woo 79), Son Heung-min, Kim Bo-kyung (Koo Ja-cheol 28), Nam Tae-hee (Kwon Chang-hoon 28; Hwang Ui-jo 53), Lee Chung-yong, Ji Dong-won (Hwang Il-su 46).
Morocco: Bounou (Tagnaouti 46) - Banoune, Chafik, El Yamiq (Boulahroud 46), Nahiri (Hakimi 26), Ait Bennasser, Fajr, Harit (Belhanda 62), Tannane, El Haddad (Ounajem 75), Mahi (Alioui 46).

Club football

AFRICA

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Semi-finals
1st legs - Sep 29/Oct1; 2nd legs - Oct 21/22
Etoile Sahel (Tun) v Al Ahly (Egy)
2-1, 2-6 (agg 4-7)
USM Alger (Alg) v Wydad Casablanca (Mor)
0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3)

CONFEDERATION CUP

Semi-finals
1st legs - Oct1; 2nd legs - Oct 21/22
SuperSport United (SAf) v Club Africain (Tun)
1-1, 3-1 (agg 4-2)
TP Mazembe (DRC) v FUS Rabat (Mor)
1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)

CAMEROON

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Eding Sport (C)	34	17	12	5	43	17	63
Coton Sport	34	15	13	6	50	27	58
APEJES Acad	34	14	12	8	42	30	54
Feutcheu	34	14	9	11	42	45	51
Stade Renard	34	11	17	6	26	22	50
Unisport	34	11	14	9	23	19	47
UMS Loum	34	11	14	9	27	26	47
YOSA	34	12	11	11	30	30	47
New Star	34	11	11	12	37	35	44
Dragon	34	11	11	12	33	39	44
Colombe	34	12	7	15	30	29	43
Union Douala	34	9	16	9	34	35	43
Bamboutos	34	10	13	11	24	26	43
Les Astres	34	11	8	15	31	33	41
Aigle Royal	34	9	13	12	25	31	40
Racing (R)	34	8	15	11	26	40	39
Lion Blesse (R)	34	5	13	16	13	30	28
Canon (R)	34	5	11	18	19	41	26

GHANA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Aduana St's (C)	30	16	9	5	45	25	57
WAFA	30	15	6	9	40	19	51
Hearts of Oak	30	13	9	8	42	33	48
Ebusua Dwarfs	30	12	8	10	39	33	44
Asante Ko'ko	30	11	10	9	23	22	43
Wa All Stars	30	11	9	10	36	32	42
Elmina Sharks	30	12	6	12	29	29	42
Berekum C	30	12	6	12	37	35	42
Medeama	30	11	9	10	35	32	42
Bechem Utd	30	12	5	13	30	31	41
Liberty Prof's	30	11	8	11	34	34	41
Ashanti Gold	30	12	5	13	38	36	41
Inter Allies	30	10	10	10	24	26	40
Tema Youth (R)	30	10	7	13	30	33	37
G Olympics (R)	30	9	9	12	27	32	36
Bolga AS (R)	30	2	6	22	21	78	12

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Semi-finals
1st legs - Sep 26/27; 2nd legs - Oct17/18
Al Hilal (Sau) v Persepolis (Irn)
4-0, 2-2 (agg 6-2)
Shanghai SIPG (Chn) v Urawa Red Diamonds (Jap)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)

AFC CUP

West Asia Zone
Final
1st leg - Sep12; 2nd leg - Sep 26
Al Wahda (Syr) v Al Quwa Al Jawiya (Irq)
2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2, Al Quwa Al Jawiya on away goals)
● *Al Quwa AlJawiya qualified for the AFC Cup Final*

ASEAN Zone
Final
1st leg - Aug 2; 2nd leg - Aug 9
Home United (Sin) v Ceres (Phi)
2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)
● *Ceres qualified for the Inter-zone semi-finals*

Inter-zone play-offs
Semi-finals
1st legs - Aug 22/23; 2nd legs - Sep12/13
Bengaluru (Ind) v April 25 (NKo)
3-0, 0-0 (agg 3-0)
Istiklol (Taj) v Ceres (Phi)
4-0, 1-1 (agg 5-1)

Final
1st leg - Sep 27; 2nd leg - Oct18
Istiklol v Bengaluru 1-0, 2-2 (agg 3-2)
● *Istiklol qualified for the AFC Cup Final*

BHUTAN

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Transport U (C)	10	9	1	0	37	11	28
Thimphu City	10	7	2	1	48	12	23
Ugyen Acad	10	5	1	4	32	10	16
Thimphu FC	10	4	1	5	25	18	13
Paro United	10	2	1	7	29	36	7
Phuentsholing	10	0	0	10	7	91	0

MONGOLIA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Erchim (C)	18	13	3	2	47	15	42
Ulaanb'r City	18	12	2	4	38	15	38
Athletic 220	18	10	4	4	32	21	34
Deren	18	9	2	7	18	15	29
Khangarid	18	7	6	5	29	27	27
Selenge Press	18	6	3	9	25	37	21
Goyo	18	5	5	8	18	25	20
FC Ulaanb'tar	18	5	2	11	26	31	17
Kh'mkhon (R)	18	4	3	11	20	44	15
Ulaan' Univ (R)	18	2	4	12	11	34	10

EUROPE

FAROE ISLANDS

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vikingur (C)	27	15	7	5	62	33	52
KI	27	14	10	3	50	26	52
B36	27	13	9	5	62	39	48
NSI	27	13	7	7	57	35	46
HB	27	10	9	8	43	31	39
Skala	27	8	9	10	31	40	33
EB/Streymur	27	9	5	13	34	49	32
TB/FCS/Royn	27	8	5	14	31	45	29
07 Vestur	27	8	4	15	37	59	28
IF (R)	27	3	3	21	23	73	12

ICELAND

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Valur (C)	22	15	5	2	43	20	50
Stjarnan	22	10	8	4	46	25	38
FH	22	9	8	5	33	25	35
KR	22	8	7	7	31	29	31
Grindavik	22	9	4	9	31	39	31
Breidablik	22	9	3	10	34	35	30
KA	22	7	8	7	37	31	29
Vikingur R	22	7	6	9	32	36	27
IBV	22	7	4	11	32	38	25
Fjolnir	22	6	7	9	32	40	25
Vikingur O (R)	22	6	4	12	24	44	22
IA (R)	22	3	8	11	28	41	17

CONCACAF

CURACAO

2017 Championship Final
Sep 17: Centro Dominguito 2 Scherpenheuvel 0.

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated
(QF) = qualified for finals
(QPO) = qualified for play-off

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35 Marwin **HITZ** (Swi) (30) 18.09.87
1 Andreas **LUTHE** (30) 10.03.87

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36 Martin **HINTEREGGER** (Aut) (25) 07.09.92
16 Christoph **JANKER** (32) 14.02.85
25 Kilian **JAKOB** (19) 2501.98
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3 Kostas **STAFYLIDIS** (Gre) (23) 02.12.93

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7 Marcel **HELLER** (31) 12.02.86
22 **JI** Dong-won (SKo) (26) 28.05.91
20 Gojko **KACAR** (Ser) (30) 26.01.87
8 Rani **KHEDIRA** (23) 27.01.94
19 **KOO** Ja-cheol (SKo) (28) 27.02.89
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14 Jan **MORAVEK** (CzR) (28) 01.11.89
9 Shawn **PARKER** (24) 07.03.93
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36 Niklas **LOMB** (24) 28.07.93
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17 Joel **POHJANPALO** (Fin) (23) 13.09.94
31 Kevin **VOLLAND** (25) 30.07.92

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34 Marco **FRIEDL** (Aut) (19) 16.03.98
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5 Mats **HUMMELS** (28) 16.12.88
32 Joshua **KIMMICH** (22) 08.02.95
8 Javi **MARTINEZ** (Spa) (29) 02.09.88
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4 Niklas **SULE** (22) 03.09.95

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30 Niklas **DORSCH** (19) 15.01.98
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11 James **RODRIGUEZ** (Col) (26) 12.07.91
19 Sebastian **RUDY** (27) 28.02.90
6 **THIAGO** (Spa) (26) 11.04.91
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24 Corentin **TOLISSO** (Fra) (23) 03.08.94
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9 Robert **LEWANDOWSKI** (Pol) (29) 21.08.88
25 Thomas **MULLER** (28) 13.09.89
41 Milos **PANTOVIC** (Ser) (21) 07.07.96
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35 Dominik **REIMANN** (20) 18.06.97
1 Roman **WEIDENFELLER** (37) 06.08.80

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24 Jan-Niklas **BESTE** (18) 04.01.99
37 Eric **DURM** (25) 12.05.92
13 Raphael **GUERREIRO** (Por)(23)22.12.93
25 Sokratis **PAPASTATHOPOULOS** (Gre) (29) 09.06.88
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19 Mahmoud **DAHOUD** (21) 01.01.96
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23 Shinji **KAGAWA** (Jap) (28) 17.03.89
22 Christian **PULISIC** (USA) (19) 18.09.98
18 Sebastian **RODE** (26) 11.10.90
7 Jadon **SANCHO** (Eng) (17) 25.03.00
8 Nuri **SAHIN** (Tur) (29) 05.09.88
21 Andre **SCHURRLE** (26) 06.11.90
33 Julian **WEIGL** (22) 08.09.95

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14 Alexander **ISAK** (Swe) (18) 21.09.99
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11 Marco **REUS** (28) 31.05.89
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34 Michael **LANGER** (Aut) (32) 06.01.85
35 Alexander **NUBEL** (21) 30.09.96

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8 Leon **GORETZKA** (22) 06.02.95
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24 Danny **DA COSTA** (24) 13.07.93
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29 Anderson **ORDONEZ** (Ecu) (23) 29.01.94
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23 Marco **RUSS** (32) 04.08.85
13 Carlos **SALCEDO** (Mex) (24) 29.09.93
33 Taleb **TAWATHA** (Isr) (25) 21.06.92
15 Jetro **WILLEMS** (Hol) (23) 30.03.94

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10 Marco **FABIAN** (Mex) (28) 21.07.89
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24 Gotoku **SAKAI** (Jap) (26) 14.03.91
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1 Yann **SOMMER** (Swi) (28) 17.12.88

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8 Denis **ZAKARIA** (Swi) (20) 20.11.96

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18 Josip **DRMIC** (Swi) (25) 08.08.92
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11 **RAFFAEL** (Bra) (32) 28.03.85
31 Ba-Muaka **SIMAKALA** (20) 28.01.97
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20 Julio **VILLALBA** (Par) (19) 11.09.98
39 Kwame **YEBOAH** (Aut) (23) 02.06.94

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17 Maximilian **MITTELSTADT** (20) 18.03.97
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21 Marvin **PLATTENHARDT** (25) 26.01.92
4 Karim **REKIK** (Hol) (23) 02.12.94
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24 Genki **HARAGUCHI** (Jap) (26) 09.05.91
30 Julius **KADE** (18) 20.05.99
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20 Valentino **LAZARO** (Aut) (21) 24.03.96
11 Mathew **LECKIE** (Aus) (26) 04.02.91
28 Fabian **LUSTENBERGER** (Swi) (29) 02.05.88
26 Arne **MAIER** (18) 08.01.99
3 Per Ciljan **SKJELBREID** (Nor) (30) 16.06.87
14 Valentin **STOCKER** (Swi) (28) 12.04.89
23 Mitchell **WEISER** (23) 21.04.94

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DEFENDERS
25 Kevin **AKPOGUMA** (22) 19.04.95
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38 Stefan **POSCH** (Aut) (20) 14.05.97

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22 Kevin **VOGT** (26) 23.09.91
17 Steven **ZUBER** (Swi) (26) 17.08.91
20 Robert **ZULJ** (Aut) (25) 05.02.92

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29 Serge **GNABRY** (22) 14.07.95
37 Robin **HACK** (19) 27.08.98
27 Andrej **KRAMARIC** (Cro) (26) 19.06.91
35 Meris **SKENDEROVIC** (19) 28.03.98
28 Adam **SZALAI** (Hun) (29) 09.12.87
19 Mark **UTH** (26) 24.08.91
14 Sandro **WAGNER** (29) 29.11.87

COACH
Julian **NAGELSMANN** (30) 23.07.87

MAINZ

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1 Rene **ADLER** (32) 15.01.85
33 Jannik **HUTH** (23) 15.04.94
22 Florian **MULLER** (19) 13.11.97
27 Robin **ZENTNER** (22) 28.10.94

DEFENDERS
3 Leon **BALOGUN** (Nga) (29) 28.06.88
16 Stefan **BELL** (26) 24.08.91
18 Daniel **BROSINSKI** (29) 17.07.88
26 Niko **BUNGERT** (31) 24.10.86
24 Gaetan **BUSSMANN** (Fra) (26) 02.02.91
4 Abdou **DIALLO** (Fra) (21) 04.05.96
2 Giulio **DONATI** (Ita) (27) 05.02.90
42 Alexander **HACK** (24) 08.09.93
13 Marin **SVERKO** (Cro) (19) 04.02.98

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34 Bote **BAKU** (19) 08.04.98
20 Fabian **FREI** (Swi) (28) 08.01.89
25 Jean-Philippe **GBAMIN** (IvC) (22) 25.05.95
38 Gerrit **HOLTMANN** (22) 25.03.95
28 Philipp **KLEMENT** (25) 09.09.92
6 Danny **LATZA** (27) 07.12.89
10 Alexandru **MAXIM** (Rom) (27) 08.07.90
21 Karim **ONISIWO** (Aut) (25) 17.03.92
8 Levin **OZTUNALI** (21) 15.03.96
7 Robin **QUAISON** (Swe) (24) 09.10.93
17 Jairo **SAMPERIO** (Spa) (24) 11.07.93
23 Suat **SERDAR** (20) 11.04.97

FORWARDS
11 Emil **BERGGREEN** (Den) (24) 10.05.93
32 Pablo **DE BLASIS** (Arg) (29) 04.02.88
14 Viktor **FISCHER** (Den) (23) 09.06.94
19 Kenan **KODRO** (Bos) (24) 19.08.93
9 Yoshinori **MUTO** (Jap) (25) 15.07.92

COACH
Sandro **SCHWARZ** (39) 17.10.78

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GOALKEEPERS
1 Fabio **COLTORTI** (Swi) (36) 03.12.80
32 Peter **GULACSI** (Hun) (27) 06.05.90
22 Philipp **KOHN** (Swi) (19) 02.04.98
28 Yvon **MVOGO** (Swi) (23) 06.06.94

DEFENDERS
3 **BERNARDO** (Bra) (22) 14.05.95
33 Marvin **COMPPER** (32) 14.06.85
23 Marcel **HALSTENBERG** (26) 27.09.91
16 Lukas **KLOSTERMANN** (21) 03.06.96
6 Ibrahima **KONATE** (Fra) (18) 25.05.99
4 Willi **ORBAN** (25) 03.11.92
20 Benno **SCHMITZ** (22) 17.11.94
5 Dayot **UPAMECANO** (Fra) (19) 27.10.98

MIDFIELDERS
31 Diego **DEMME** (25) 21.11.91
13 Stefan **ILSANKER** (Aut) (28) 18.05.89
24 Dominik **KAISER** (29) 16.09.88
44 Kevin **KAMPL** (Sln) (27) 09.10.90
8 Naby **KEITA** (Gui) (22) 10.02.95
27 Konrad **LAIMER** (Aut) (20) 27.05.97
7 Marcel **SABITZER** (Aut) (23) 17.03.94

FORWARDS
29 Jean-Kevin **AUGUSTIN** (Fra) (20) 16.06.97
17 **BRUMA** (Por) (23) 24.10.94
10 Emil **FORSBERG** (Swe) (26) 23.10.91
26 Nikolas-Gerrit **KUHN** (17) 01.01.00
38 Federico **PALACIOS** (22) 09.04.95
9 Yussuf **POULSEN** (Den) (23) 15.06.94
11 Timo **WERNER** (21) 06.03.96

COACH
Ralph **HASENHUTTL** (Aut) (50) 09.08.67

HANOVER

GOALKEEPERS
23 Michael **ESSER** (29) 22.11.87
30 Samuel **SAHIN-RADLINGER** (Aut) (24) 07.11.92
1 Philipp **TSCHAUNER** (32) 03.11.85

DEFENDERS
3 Miiko **ALBORNOZ** (Chl) (26) 30.11.90
31 Waldemar **ANTON** (21) 20.07.96
33 Fynn **ARKENBERG** (21) 04.03.96
5 **FELIPE** (Bra) (30) 15.05.87
15 Timo **HUBERS** (21) 20.07.96
19 Florian **HUBNER** (26) 01.03.91
4 Julian **KORB** (25) 21.03.92
22 Matthias **OSTRZOLEK** (27) 05.06.90
21 Lars **RITZKA** (19) 07.05.98
25 Oliver **SORG** (27) 29.05.90

MIDFIELDERS
28 Mike-Steven **BAHRE** (22) 10.08.95
38 Tom **BALLER** (19) 02.08.98
6 Marvin **BAKALORZ** (28) 13.09.89
29 Mete Kaan **DEMIR** (Tur) (29) 13.05.98
18 Iver **FOSSUM** (Nor) (21) 15.07.96
11 Felix **KLAUS** (25) 13.09.92
10 Sebastian **MAIER** (24) 18.09.93
7 Edgar **PRIB** (Rus) (27) 15.12.89
20 Salif **SANE** (Sen) (27) 25.08.90
37 Noah-Joel **SARENREN-BAZEE** (Nga) (21) 21.08.96
8 Manuel **SCHMIEDEBACH** (28) 05.12.88
27 Pirmin **SCHWEGLER** (Swi) (30) 09.03.87

FORWARDS
13 Ihlas **BEBOU** (Tog) (23) 23.04.94
17 Uffe **BECH** (Den) (24) 13.01.93
35 Charlison **BENSCHOP** (Hol) (28) 21.08.89
16 Yousef **EMGHAMES** (19) 19.01.98
24 Niclas **FULLKRUG** (24) 09.02.93
14 Martin **HARNIK** (Aut) (30) 10.06.87
9 **JONATHAS** (Bra) (28) 06.03.89
26 Kenan **KARAMAN** (Tur) (23) 05.03.94

COACH
Andre **BREITENREITER** (44) 02.10.73

STUTTGART

GOALKEEPERS
13 Jens **GRAHL** (29) 22.09.88
26 Alexander **MEYER** (26) 13.04.91
16 Ron-Robert **ZIELER** (28) 12.02.89

DEFENDERS
29 **AILTON** (Bra) (22) 16.03.95
3 Dennis **AOGO** (30) 14.01.87
28 Holger **BADSTUBER** (28) 13.03.89
5 Timo **BAUMGARTL** (21) 04.03.96
32 Andreas **BECK** (30) 13.03.87
2 Emiliano **INSUA** (Arg) (28) 07.01.89
35 Marcin **KAMINSKI** (Pol) (25) 15.01.92
21 Benjamin **PAVARD** (Fra) (21) 28.03.96

MIDFIELDERS
6 Santiago **ASCACIBAR** (Arg) (20) 25.02.97
7 Josip **BREKALO** (Cro) (19) 23.06.98
24 Dzenis **BURNIC** (19) 22.05.98
20 Christian **GENTNER** (32) 14.08.85
8 Anto **GRGIC** (Swi) (20) 28.11.96
15 Carlos **MANE** (Por) (23) 11.03.94
23 Orel **MANGALA** (Blg) (19) 18.03.98
22 Ebenezer **OFORI** (Gha) (22) 01.07.95
31 Berkay **OZCAN** (Tur) (19) 15.02.98
39 Nicolas **SESSA** (21) 23.03.96
25 Matthias **ZIMMERMANN** (25) 16.06.92

FORWARDS
19 Chadrac **AKOLO** (DRC) (22) 01.04.95
11 Takuma **ASANO** (Jap) (22) 10.11.94
14 Anastasios **DONIS** (21) 29.08.96
33 Daniel **GINCZEK** (26) 13.04.91
9 Simon **TERODDE** (29) 02.03.88

COACH
Hannes **WOLF** (36) 15.04.81

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GOALKEEPERS
33 Jaroslav **DROBNY** (CzR) (37) 18.10.79
1 Jir **PAVLENKA** (CzR) (25) 14.03.92
40 Luca **PLOGMANN** (17) 10.03.00
30 Michael **ZETTERER** (22) 12.07.95

DEFENDERS
5 Ludwig **AUGUSTINSSON** (Swe) (23) 21.04.94
4 Robert **BAUER** (22) 09.04.95
3 Luca **CALDIROLA** (Ita) (26) 01.02.91
20 Ulisses **GARCIA** (Swi) (21) 11.01.96
23 Theodor **GEBRE SELASSIE** (CzR) (30) 24.12.86
18 Niklas **MOISANDER** (Fin) (32) 29.09.85
26 Lamine **SANE** (Sen) (30) 22.03.87
28 Jesper **VERLAAT** (Hol) (21) 04.06.96

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44 Philipp **BARGFREDE** (28) 03.03.89
22 Fin **BARTELS** (30) 07.02.87
6 Thomas **DELANEY** (Den) (26) 03.09.91
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16 Zlatko **JUNUZOVIC** (Aut) (30) 26.09.87
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13 Milos **VELJKOVIC** (Ser) (22) 26.09.95

FORWARDS
29 Ishak **BELFODIL** (Alg) (25) 12.01.92
17 Justin **EILERS** (29) 13.06.88
24 Johannes **EGGESTEIN** (19) 08.05.98
9 Aron **JOHANNSSON** (USA) (26) 10.11.90
10 Max **KRUSE** (29) 19.03.88
47 Ousman **MANNEH** (Gam) (20) 10.03.97
19 **ZHANG** Yuning (Chn) (20) 05.01.97

COACH
Alexander **NOURI** (38) 20.08.79

WOLFSBURG

GOALKEEPERS
1 Koen **CASTEELS** (Blg) (25) 25.06.92
20 Max **GRUN** (30) 05.04.87
36 Phillip **MENZEL** (19) 18.08.98

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25 John **BROOKS** (USA) (24) 28.01.93
5 Jeffrey **BRUMA** (Hol) (25) 13.11.91
13 Yannick **GERHARDT** (23) 13.03.94
35 Gian-Luca **ITTER** (18) 05.01.99
24 Sebastian **JUNG** (27) 22.06.90
31 Robin **KNOCHE** (25) 22.05.92
29 Marcel **TISSERAND** (DRC) (24) 10.01.93
17 Ohis **FELIX** Uduokhai (20) 09.09.97
3 Paul **VERHAEGH** (Hol) (34) 01.09.83
2 **WILLIAM** (Bra) (22) 03.04.95

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27 Maximilian **ARNOLD** (23) 27.05.94
6 Riechedly **BAZOER** (Hol) (21) 12.10.96
16 Jakub **BLASZCZYKOWSKI** (Pol) (31) 14.12.85
4 Ignacio **CAMACHO** (Spa) (27) 04.05.90
11 Daniel **DIDAVI** (27) 21.02.90
23 Josuha **GUILAVOGUI** (Fra) (27) 19.09.90
10 Yunus **MALLI** (Tur) (25) 24.02.92
26 Justin **MOBIUS** (20) 21.04.97
7 Paul-Georges **NTEP** (Fra) (25) 29.07.92
37 Elvis **REXHBECAJ** (20) 01.11.97
34 Marvin **STEFANIAK** (22) 03.02.95

FORWARDS
9 Landry **DIMATA** (Blg) (20) 01.09.97
33 Mario **GOMEZ** (32) 10.07.85
32 Kaylen **HINDS** (Eng) (19) 28.01.98
14 Divock **ORIGI** (Blg) (22) 18.04.95
18 Victor **OSIMHEN** (Nga) (18) 29.12.98

COACH
Martin **SCHMIDT** (50) 12.04.67

Wolfsburg... Younes Malli

(ages as of 03.11.17)

World Soccer's GREAT MATCHES

JULY 4, 1998, MARSEILLE: WORLD CUP QUARTER-FINAL

Holland 2 Argentina 1

Bergkamp's brilliance sees off South Americans in a thrilling encounter on the Mediterranean coast

Tipped over...Argentina keeper Carlos Roa saves a header from Patrick Kluivert

In the first World Cup meeting between these two teams since the 1978 Final, Gavin Hamilton wrote: "In an era when international football is increasingly dependent on playing systems that stifle rather than promote creative talent, Dennis Bergkamp provided a powerfully refreshing reminder of how matches can be won by moments of individual brilliance."

In an incident-packed game, Holland took the lead through Patrick Kluivert after Matias Almeyda was beaten by Ronald De Boer – just as he had been five days earlier in Saint-Etienne by England's Michael Owen.

Argentina equalised and then hit the woodwork twice, but the game hinged on a moment of madness from Ariel Ortega. When the referee ignored what looked like a trip by Jaap Stam and punished the Argentinian's theatrical dive with a yellow card, Ortega head-butted Dutch keeper Edwin Van der Sar and was sent off.

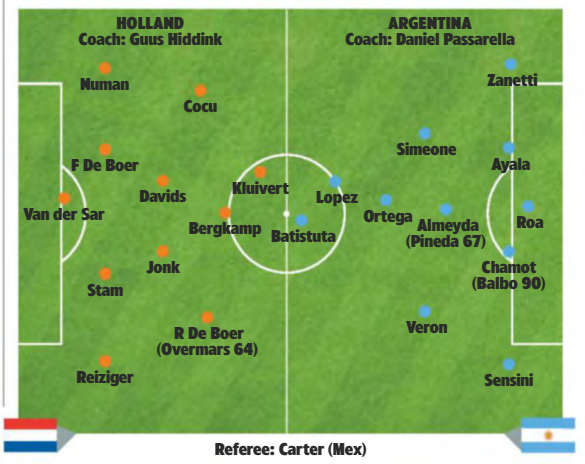
Then, almost instantly, as Hamilton explains: "There were only seconds remaining when Frank De Boer aimed a long pass from his own half at Bergkamp.

"He cushioned the ball with devastating ease and before [Roberto] Ayala had time to grasp the accuracy of the Dutchman's control, Bergkamp used the sole of a boot to trap the bouncing ball and turn inside his marker in a single move.

"Then as the ball bounced up a second time, he struck a sweet volley past [Carlos] Roa in the Argentina goal. It was a remarkable piece of skill."

Although Berkamp's wonder goal took Holland into the semi-finals, their stay in France ended three days later as they lost on penalties to Brazil. WS

Challenge...Holland's Edgar Davids (right) and Ariel Ortega



Referee: Carter (Mex)

KEY MOMENTS

Level...Claudio Lopez (right) equalises

5min Holland's Wim Jonk hits the post with a volley.

12min Ronald De Boer crosses to Dennis Bergkamp at the far post, who cushions a header into the path of Patrick Kluivert to score. **1-0**

17min Claudio Lopez beats the offside trap to meet a through ball from Juan Veron and nutmegs Edwin Van der Sar for the equaliser. **1-1**

37min A fierce curling shot from Ariel Ortega rebounds off the bottom of Van Der Sar's left-hand post.

63min Gabriel Batistuta turns inside Frank De Boer but his shot then hits the inside of the post.

64min Marc Overmars crosses to Kluivert whose header is tipped over by Carlos Roa.

72min Arthur Numan, already on a booking, is sent off following a late tackle on Diego Simeone.

87min Ortega head-butts Van Der Sar and is sent off.

Seeing red...Ariel Ortega

89min From the resulting free-kick, a long ball by Frank De Boer is controlled with great skill by Bergkamp, who beats Roa. **2-1**

Winner...Dennis Bergkamp (right)

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